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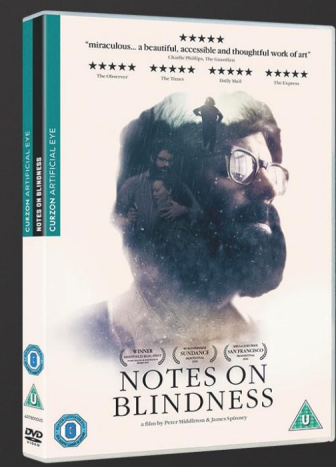
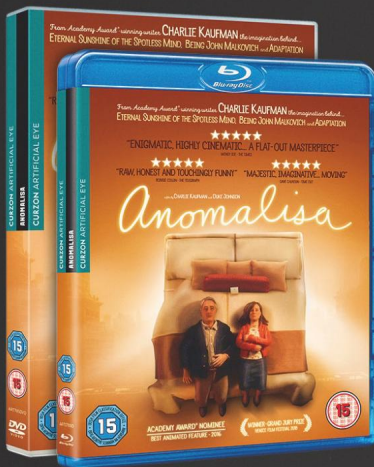
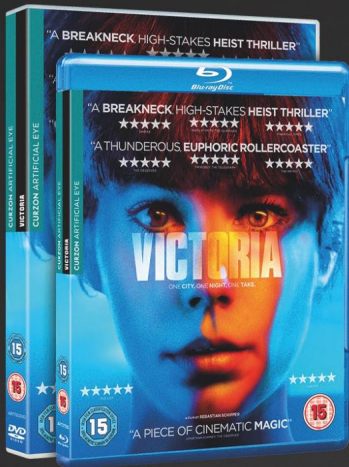




# CURZON TAKE HOME

## ARTIFICIAL EYE

# THE BEST FILMS OF 2016



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Our poll reveals 2016 as a great year for non-Hollywood film. And in a small triumph for diversity, three of our top five films are by female directors. Introduction by **Nick James**

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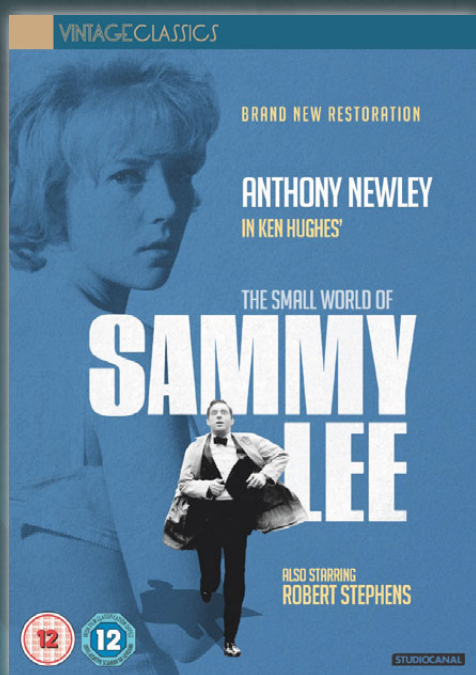


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# Editorial Nick James



## LINES OF CREDIT

Around the turn of this century, a run of film successes from the laptop of screenwriter Charlie Kaufman brought us *Being John Malkovich* (1999), *Adaptation* (2002), *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind* (2002) and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004). These groundbreaking films seemed to usher in a new respect for the scriptwriter. In that age of rising nerds like Mark Zuckerberg, who devised Facebook around the same time, it was conceivable that nerdish writers like Kaufman would at last taste the glamour and kudos previously denied them. It was, of course, a false dawn.

The convention for people writing about films has long been to credit authorship entirely to the director. This was the case long before André Bazin and the New Wave gang came up with the auteur theory. Yet the convention for reviewers of TV drama series is to favour the writer. This cross-trade dichotomy used to make sense. In the great analogue age of auteur directors, European writer-directors of reputation controlled every aspect of how a film looked and sounded, with nothing like the level of interference from executives that there is now. When, in the 1970s, American cinema took a similar auteurist route, screenwriters did a lot of lucrative uncredited work. But at the same time, the innovative TV drama of the 1970s and 80s was chalked up to the writers, possibly because what a director could do about its visual quality was limited, unless, that is, they were an Alan Clarke or a Ken Loach.

Such distinctions have long been moot. Now that we have big hi-def TVs served by cinematography of the first order, how is it that people directing TV drama – whose creative input is every bit as crucial as the writers – get a secondary credit? And conversely, how is it that a screenwriter who has nurtured a film project for years can get less credit than some director for hire who has been brought in at the last minute simply to bring to life a project from a meticulous and brilliant blueprint?

Such considerations were brought into focus by the awarding of this year's Wellcome Screenwriting Fellowship to Sally Wainwright, the brilliant writer of TV's *Happy Valley*, *Last Tango In Halifax* and *Scott & Bailey*. The fellowship, now in its fourth year, offers a £30,000 bursary, but the more important element is the year's use of Wellcome's resources, which include access to experts in scientific and medical fields, as well as to its library and private archives. The decision as to who gets the award is made in collaboration with the BFI and Film4. What makes Wainwright's success such a pleasing surprise is that she's the first person to win it who's not, in the traditional sense, a film auteur.

The first fellowship, in 2013, went to Clio Barnard, who had just made *The Selfish Giant*; next came Jonathan Glazer (*Under the Skin*) and last year it was Carol Morley (*The Falling*). These three terrific



*The convention for people writing about films has long been to credit authorship entirely to the director. Yet the convention for reviewers of TV drama series is to favour the writer*

filmmakers are familiar to *Sight & Sound* readers, Wainwright possibly less so. Yet even she breaks the code of expectations, because she directed several episodes of the second series of *Happy Valley*. Credits are often murky waters. We know, for instance, that most big US drama series involve a number of writers gathered together, yet in the UK the impression at least remains that the writer largely works alone. But perhaps that may change as TV production becomes increasingly transatlantic in the age of Netflix and Amazon's original programming. Netflix's *The Crown*, for instance, is credited to Peter Morgan alone, though I'm pretty sure other writers were involved. On the other hand, Charlie Brooker gets listed as the creator of *Black Mirror*, although other writers are still credited. When a name film director gets involved in a TV series they're suddenly treated differently – as was the case with Susanne Bier for *The Night Manager*.

There are, no doubt, legal complexities, established hierarchies, egos and money concerns behind these various credits, but now that the convergence of all moving image media is so pronounced and so many 'creators' are one kind of hyphenate or another, one wonders how much longer these contrasting conventions of authorship and ownership can survive. I'm not proposing to change what's on the top line of our film reviews just yet, but the lazy assumptions that a film is by an all-seeing director and a TV drama by an all-seeing writer are surely on their last legs and we will do better to reflect that in future.



IN THE FRAME

## THE FABRIC OF DREAMS



Closet encounters: Kyle MacLachlan as Jeffrey



After midnight: Isabella Rossellini as Dorothy

To mark the 30th anniversary rerelease of *Blue Velvet*, we reprint a 1987 interview in which **David Lynch** explained the roots of the film's dark fantasies

Bobby Vinton's song 'Blue Velvet' was the beginning of a whole series of ideas for the film. It conjured up a mood to do with small towns and mystery. And then, I'd always had a desire to sneak into a girl's apartment and watch her through the night. I had the idea that while I was doing this I'd see something which I'd later realise was the clue to a mystery. I think people are fascinated by that, by being able to see into a world they couldn't visit. That's the fantastic thing about cinema, everybody can be a voyeur. Voyeurism is a bit like watching television – go one step further and you want to start looking in on things that are really happening. That's where Sandy comes into *Blue Velvet*. She doesn't go into Dorothy's world herself but she prompts Jeffrey to go deeper and deeper.

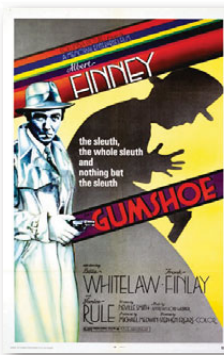
The other starting point for the film was an idea about an ear – that an ear in a field could

be a ticket into another world. Once found, it would be like a bell answered in the night: nothing would be the same again. There are certain things which stand out when you are going down a street, out of the ordinary things which just stick in your mind, things which sparkle like a little gift left on a sidewalk. That doesn't happen all the time, but when it does, it brings so much power that you can't forget it.

I like the idea that everything has a surface which hides much more underneath. Someone can look very well and have a whole bunch of diseases cooking: there are all sorts of dark, twisted things lurking down there. I go down in that darkness and see what's there. Coffee shops are nice safe places to think. I like sitting in brightly lit places where I can drink coffee and have some sugar. Then, before I know it, I'm down

### Neville Smith

HOME Manchester's focus on overlooked British screenwriters continues with a season devoted to the football-loving British actor and writer – and regular collaborator of Stephen Frears and Ken Loach. Showing throughout January are classics such as the witty noir spoof 'Gumshoe' (1971, right), as well as two of Loach's finest TV dramas, both scripted by Smith: 'The Golden Vision' (1968) and 'After a Lifetime' (1971).



### Slapstick Festival

Bristol's annual celebration of riproaring comedy returns in January, featuring many funny women from the silent era, including Annette Benson in 'Shooting Stars' (1928), Clara Bow in 'Kid Boots' (1926) and Colleen Moore in 'Why Be Good?' (1929, right). The festival also pays tribute to three recently departed comedians: Victoria Wood, Rik Mayall and French clown and filmmaker Pierre Etaix.




ON OUR  
RADAR





David Lynch: 'That's the fantastic thing about cinema, everybody can be a voyeur'

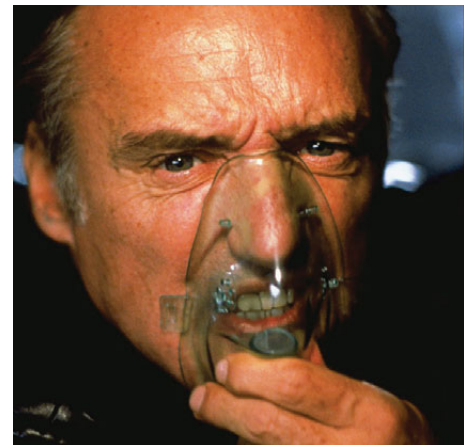
under the surface gliding along; if it becomes too heavy, I can always pop back into the coffee shop.

When you make a film like *Blue Velvet*, there's a danger that Dorothy becomes every woman and Sandy becomes every girl and the film becomes a statement on America. That's not what I meant. *Blue Velvet*'s a film about a small town called Lumberton and this particular group of characters. Jeffrey is not me, but Kyle MacLachlan says he somewhat fashioned him on me. I feel very good about Jeffrey. He's a person who is curious and has got some dark areas inside him. But he has experiences, and he learns from them. Originally published in *Monthly Film Bulletin* in April 1987. Interview by Jane Root. 

 **Blue Velvet is rereleased in UK cinemas on 2 December. To read more archive articles, visit [bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/subscribe](http://bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/subscribe)**



Jeffrey finds the ear, 'a ticket to another world'



Dennis Hopper as Frank

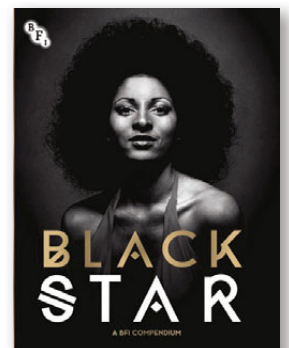
### Martin Scorsese

Coinciding with the release of Scorsese's 'Silence' (in cinemas on 1 January) is a UK-wide celebration of the American auteur (right). 'GoodFellas' comes back to the big screen on 20 January, followed by 'Taxi Driver' on 10 February; there are BFI DVD and Blu-ray releases of 'Who's That Knocking at My Door' and 'Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore' and a Scorsese collection on BFI Player, too – not to mention a complete retrospective at BFI Southbank, London (1 January – 28 February), including Scorsese's selection of his favourite 20 Film Foundation restorations.



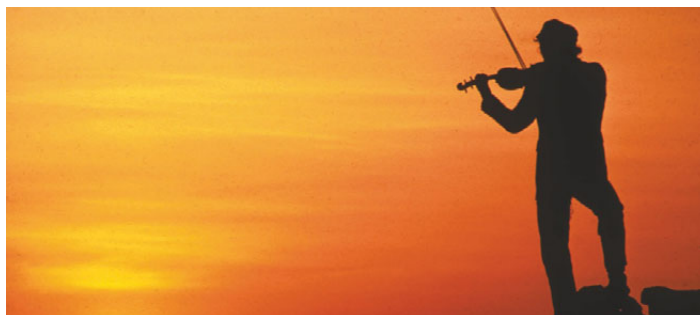
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Stuck for Christmas present ideas for the film lover in your life? Try one of the six books in the BFI's Compendium series, which are produced in the 'Sight & Sound' office. Following volumes on Hitchcock, Gothic cinema, Chinese cinema, science fiction and love and romance movies, the latest volume, 'Black Star', explores the story of black stars of film and television. All are available from the BFI Shop: [shop.bfi.org.uk](http://shop.bfi.org.uk)





# CUE THE VIOLINS



Concerning violins: (clockwise from top left) *Un coeur en hiver* (1992), *Fiddler on the Roof* (1971), *A Late Quartet* (2012) and *Intermezzo* (1939)

As a symbol of craft and artistry, the violin can hold out the promise of a better life or represent a classical prison from which to escape



**By Hannah McGill**

A violin doesn't have to be seen on screen to make an indelible cinematic impact. History has it that the shrieking strings

which so memorably accompany the shower scene in *Psycho* (1960) went against Alfred Hitchcock's original intention that the sequence should play out without music, and were the consequence of a late suggestion from composer Bernard Herrmann that the film should have a score composed only of strings. Composer David Arnold has explained the particular impact of the shower scene thus: "All the way through this score, the orchestra plays with mutes on, apart from that one scene... That's what gives that incredible shrieking sound." So just as Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins) has discarded his chivalrousness and let his untamed instincts out, so the violins have been given full licence to screech – and the effect is unsettling enough to have become more recognisable than virtually any other movie music.

A violin can also serve as a potent indicator of status and character while barely being heard from at all. When in Yaron Zilberman's *A Late Quartet* (2012), Robert (Philip Seymour Hoffman) tries to secure a rare violin for his daughter at auction, the self-aggrandising profligacy of the gesture and the bitterness of his response when he's outbid fair and square tell us everything we need to know about him (even if real violinists complained upon seeing the film that \$25,000 for a Gagliano was an improbable bargain). What Robert seemingly regards as the pursuit of

authenticity and raw commitment ("You've taken a fine instrument away from a real musician," he rails at the successful buyer) is offered to the audience as evidence of insufferable priggishness. And perhaps it's in that gap – between how Robert sees himself, and how his behaviour plays to the audience – that we can discern the range of parts played by the violin in cinema.

In its exquisite delicacy of form and sound, the tension upon which its mechanics rely and the sheer difficulty of learning to play it, the instrument represents the finest artistry and most rarefied skill of which humans are capable. It can be played with peasant vigour, as in *Fiddler on the Roof* (1971), or like the Balkan gypsy rambles of Emir Kusturica, or the Scottish and Irish ceilidhs in *I Know Where I'm Going!* (1945) to *Local Hero* (1983) and *Titanic* (1997). But its nervy tautness and high thin notes are also suggestive of fastidiousness, perfectionism and over-sensitivity – characteristics which, like the propensity to shriek, connote effeteness and frailty.

As a symbol then, the violin can serve to represent a prison of classical stuffiness which the passionate must escape in favour of more raw and spontaneous sources of self-expression, as in *Alexander's Ragtime Band* (1938), in which a classical violinist finds freedom in jazz; *School of Rock* (2003), which sees geeky fourth-graders escape the tyranny of prestige instruments in favour of blue-collar rock 'n' roll; and *Downtown Express* (2012), in which an immigrant violinist is torn between his scholarship to Juilliard and a raggle-taggle band of buskers.

But the reverse can also apply: the violin is an instrument that in its delicacy and beauty promises the potential for a more refined, more

*In its exquisite delicacy, the instrument represents the finest artistry and most rarefied skill of which humans are capable*

comfortable life. In *Music of the Heart* (1999) and *The Violin Teacher* (2015), accomplished violinists improve the prospects of inner-city kids by bringing them classical music – of course, reconnecting with their own musical gifts in the process. But such disregard for social and class boundaries is not without its problems. In both *Golden Boy* (1939) and *Humoresque* (1946), a working class man's gift for the violin presents the potential for social mobility – and plenty of associated problems. For Paul (John Garfield) in *Humoresque*, the costs of being where he doesn't belong are embodied in the woman he attracts as a result: Joan Crawford's needy, manipulative socialite Helen. Gorgeous, highly strung and distinctly difficult to manage, Helen might be considered a sort of human violin. Certainly Crawford's famously intense and libidinous responses to Paul's performances offer the suggestion that it's Helen's body being played.

It's a dinner party debate about whether art belongs to the masses or to elites that helps to reveal the romantic problem at the centre of *Un coeur en hiver* (*A Heart in Winter*, 1992). Violinist Camille (Emmanuelle Béart) becomes irritated at the equivocal responses of violin restorer Stéphane (Daniel Auteuil); and yet his disquieting lack of engagement in the argument serves to fuel her growing romantic interest in him. As in *Humoresque*, passion, so easily stirred up and eloquently expressed by sequences of notes, is a chaotic and unsatisfying business in real life; and shared appreciation of fine music cannot surmount basic incompatibility.

The association of violin music with tragic emotional climaxes – "cue the violins" goes the sarcastic response to self-indulgent anecdote – means that we might reasonably expect a cinematic relationship involving violins to end badly. Or, at best, in tragic stoicism. "I have been an *intermezzo* in his life," mourns pianist Anita (Ingrid Bergman) in *Intermezzo* (1939), when her adulterous love affair with Leslie Howard's famous violinist comes to its close. 🎻



# A LOVER'S DISCOURSE

The amorous correspondence between poets Ingeborg Bachmann and Paul Celan lies at the heart of the intriguing *The Dreamed Ones*

**By Thirza Wakefield**

Austrian documentary-maker Ruth Beckermann makes her fiction debut with *The Dreamed Ones*, a moving and unusual film as languorous as its title suggests. Beckermann casts actor Laurence Rupp and musician Anja Plaschg as voice-artists tasked with recording a reading of the impassioned letters that passed between two celebrated poets: the Austrian Ingeborg Bachmann and Paul Celan, a Romanian Jew whose parents were killed in internment camps during World War II. The poets had a brief love affair in their twenties in post-war Vienna, and then began a correspondence that continued until Celan's death in 1970. The letters' urgency and the lovers' yearning is undiminished after all these years, and their tone is alternately tender, petitioning, bitter, ardent, arch.

During breaks between recording sessions, Beckermann's actors smoke and make small talk. But these exchanges, shared in recesses around the radio building, are charged with something of the emotional intensity of the readings that precede them. The performers' very proximity seems to brim with erotic possibility – although whether such a charge really exists between the actors or whether the audience, absorbed in the letters, is merely looking for it there is hard to say, and this ambivalence imparts a richness to what is otherwise a modestly conceived film.

**Thirza Wakefield: How did you arrive at the idea of a staged reading?**

**Ruth Beckermann:** It's always difficult to make a film of staged letters, because the writers are in two places. Usually, when someone makes a film about letters, you see one person reading or writing, and the other is off elsewhere. I didn't want to make a film about the two personalities, and neither about the act of writing. I really wanted to transform the words, the words themselves, into film.

**TW: How did the filmmaking process on this film compare with your normal practice?**

**RB:** The start is always the same: it's a concept. I compare it to architecture: if you build a house, the statics are what is most important. So with a film: it has to hold up. From the moment I decided to make this film, I knew I wanted the larger part to be shot in a recording studio. That was the concept: two young actors – not playing Bachmann and Celan, but voice-artists – who meet in a studio. That's all; very simple. Initially, I thought I would shoot more outside – in places where they lived [Paris, Vienna] – in a free-associative way, and use voiceover. But during the shoot it struck me that it would be better to stay in this one building, so that we might focus more on inner space. It was a good decision.

**TW: In the poem 'In Egypt', on which the film opens, Paul uses the word 'stranger' of Ingeborg. The dynamic between the two voice-artists I found to be a valuable reminder that all lovers begin as strangers. Two decades' worth of words**



Passion project: Anja Plaschg and Laurence Rupp in *The Dreamed Ones*

**pass between Paul and Ingeborg, but they were new to each other during that first love affair in Vienna. How important was it to you that the two performers you cast were strangers?**

**RB:** I was not aware when I made this decision whether it would make a difference or not. But it does. In retrospect, I'm very pleased I didn't take two actors. That Anja wasn't an actress added another dimension to the performers' relationship. She was anxious about working with a professional actor, and Laurence was shy because Anja's such a star. They didn't know initially what to make of one another, and that was very interesting to watch. As for the poem: of course, you're right, all lovers begin as strangers. But, more than this, 'In Egypt' sets the tone: Ingeborg will always be a stranger. That poem gives her her place, and fixes it. And that's how it went: she tried to come closer, but he set the limits time and again.

**TW: Speaking of coming closer, were the recording mics moved closer together as the film progressed? It seemed to me the performers edged gradually nearer each other.**

**RB:** Yes, that's a very good observation. We worked a lot on the *mise en scène*. The DP [Johannes Hammel] was great, very adaptable – because, of

*The experiment was to watch what happened. What will come of having two young, attractive strangers read from these letters?*



Ruth Beckermann

course, we wrote the script and then altered it in situ. Handheld cameras allowed us to be flexible.

**TW: In an interview you gave following the release of your documentary *Those Who Go Those Who Stay* [2013], you said it was beneficial to get lost during the filming process. How easy was it to get lost with this film, it being different from your others in that it's fiction and scripted?**

**RB:** Yeah, that's true. Did I get lost? Much less. The way I make a documentary, I really prepare, and then try to forget and go with my guts. Sometimes you feel lost, and then you rewrite the whole film on the editing table. That's why the editing takes a long time with documentaries. With *The Dreamed Ones*, we had the letters and the chronology already in place, so I put a rough cut together faster than I would typically. Then, with all these 'pauses', I could reorder them, shift them around.

**TW: These 'pauses' or breaks in which the actors wander about the building – what effect were you after? Was the idea that the material, the letters' emotional content, rub off on the performers?**

**RB:** I really like surprises. I had no desire to make a fully scripted fiction film, but something that had space in it for improvisation – and revelation. I was quite certain that these letters would 'rub off', as you say. That's why I wanted young people. It's not true that technology has desensitised the young. Maybe it has some. But, even in their time, Paul and Ingeborg were unusual; special. The experiment for me was to watch what happened. What will come of having two young, attractive strangers read from these letters? I didn't know the answer.

**TW: May I ask about your next project?**

**RB:** I've been working for two days at the BBC, doing research. I'm making a compilation film about Kurt Waldheim. He was the secretary-general of the UN in the 80s, and then he ran for the Austrian presidency. During his campaign, it was discovered that he had lied about his wartime past. It was a big affair: for the first time, Austria was forced to confront its Nazi past. I'm making the film with found footage only, which I've never done before. Always new challenges!

**i** *The Dreamed Ones* is out now in select UK cinemas and was reviewed in our last issue





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# BONJOUR TRISTESSE



Amy Adams radiates sadness on screen, defining the colour and tones of the films she graces with her mesmerising presence



**By Mark Cousins**

The silent era had Garbo. The 1940s had Greer Garson. The 50s had Ingrid Bergman. In the 1960s and 70s, there were Ellen Burstyn,

Gena Rowlands and Sissy Spacek. The 80s and since have had Meryl Streep, Jessica Lange, Alfre Woodward, Susan Sarandon and Cate Blanchett.

American cinema has always needed new women to embody the disappointment and sadness that it sometimes allows itself to admit to or evince. Judging by the back-to-back releases of Tom Ford's Hitchcockian guilt drama *Nocturnal Animals* and Denis Villeneuve's misty close encounter parable *Arrival*, a new American lightning rod for tristesse is Amy Adams.

In these films, Adams is neither girl nor gamine; no Audrey, Winona or Natalie Portman. Godard wouldn't know what to do with her. She doesn't just submit to the dejection in the films' storylines, nor is she simply a function of their disconsolations. She's not in them to be admired. Instead, she seems to colour them and give them their tones. Perhaps that's how sadness works – it radiates.

Part of the pleasure of seeing Adams on screen these days is the contrast with what she's done before. In her first lead role, in Disney's self-parodying *Enchanted* (2007), she's all ribbons and bows: Snow White stepped out of the drawn world into the real world. In an early interview she said she was "attracted to characters who are

positive and come from a very innocent place". But then she played the wife of the preacher-healer in Paul Thomas Anderson's *The Master* (2012). Hair up, we could see that lantern face more purely than before, and the determination therein. Born into a Mormon military family, real life had tested her. "I didn't have a huge skillset coming out of school, and I was my sole provider... a bootstrap kid." We could see the bootstrap kid in *The Master*, and also those eyes, which are wider than the norm (the opposite of Kirsten Dunst's) and whose pupils are small. Bowie and Kim Novak had eyes that helped shape their careers. Adams's are piercing, and so it's fitting that Tim Burton give her the lead in *Big Eyes* (2014).

After *The Master* she played Lois Lane and then Sydney in David O. Russell's *American Hustle* (2013). Watch how she dances to Donna Summer in its club scene. Look at her braless outfits, and those dresses that show the underside of her breasts. She'd replaced boot straps with 70s silver slingbacks, but her performance was the sexiest in American cinema in years – strutting, Dionysian, innovating. Again the film's tone – inebriated, desperate and songful – is set by her performance.

"It's a strange transition to come from a survivalist place to a more artistic place," said Adams of her increasing power in the industry in these years. She clocked that increase as it was happening and is using it as wisely as Julie Christie did, decades earlier. By the time of *Nocturnal Animals* and *Arrival*, extra things were happening with her on screen. In movies now she seems like she's in a Virginia Woolf novel.

*American cinema has always needed new women to embody the disappointment and sadness it sometimes allows itself to admit*

Woolf's books seem to exist because of their central character's thoughts. Adams's films seem the same. Directors can't help but film her in close up, to get nearer to those eyes. Unlike John Wayne or Marilyn Monroe, her walk isn't very distinctive – a walking shot in a car park in *Arrival* is used to show her ordinariness – but the closer you get, the more you feel the Woolfian Tardis, the way that she's bigger on the inside. Adams is better at looking than being looked at, and great at slowness and blanching. She's often in minimal make-up but seems sadder still in lipstick and eye-shadow, as if they are admissions of defeat, or another manifestation of the boot strap.

Some say that *Nocturnal Animals* is anti-woman, but I don't agree. She treated a weak man badly in it and now the guilt means she can hardly sleep. It's an anti-femme fatale film. *Arrival*, based on a story by Ted Chiang, is a *quai des brumes*. The weather in it is misty, the light is soft, the colours muted, the contrast low. Adams's Louise Banks has echoes of another LB in another misty place: Laura Baxter, played by Julie Christie in the Venice-set *Don't Look Now* (1973). Perhaps it's inevitable that an actor's best work will happen in a great film, but *Arrival* is such a thing. Her face has never been more lantern-like, her melancholia never better calibrated. The film's anti-belicosity is moving at a moment when we have someone called President-Elect Trump. There's a hint in Adams's walk into shot, towards a wall-window, to pour herself a glass of wine at what looks like dusk, that the moment is the fount of the whole film – though to say more would be a spoiler.

Amy Adams is a fount for American cinema at the moment, and that's great news. Todd Haynes doesn't need her – he's got Julianne Moore and Cate Blanchett. But imagine if the Coen brothers or Tarantino or the Wachowskis worked with her, and what Chantal Akerman would have made of her, and vice versa. **S**



DEVELOPMENT TALE

## SNOWDEN



I can hear that whistle-blowing: Joseph Gordon-Levitt as Edward Snowden

The politics of a film about Edward Snowden and the NSA were complicated enough even before Hollywood studios got involved

**By Charles Gant**

The initial approach to US-based, German-born producer Moritz Borman, a serial collaborator with Oliver Stone, was hardly encouraging. A French producer telephoned to say that Edward Snowden's lawyer Anatoly Kucherena had written a fiction book inspired by the Snowden affair, which they'd like Stone to make into a film, but Borman would have to come to Moscow in order to read it: "To which I said, 'I don't think that that is possible, this ain't going to happen, and by the way, who are you?' I just didn't believe it."

On the discovery that the French producer didn't actually have the rights, and that they resided with Kucherena, negotiations turned a corner. Kucherena offered to send his son Alexander to meet Stone – who was travelling in Asia at the time – and hand him the book, then accompany him to Moscow. He also invited Borman, and the two men would also get to meet Snowden.

Stone picks up the story: "I read the book on the plane, and I found it very interesting. It was a fiction, no question, with the name changed [to Joshua Cold], and it was a long Dostoevsky-like confession in the basement of the airport, between this American dissident and a Russian

human rights lawyer. It was really philosophical, going off into Orwell-like monologues about the state of surveillance in the modern era."

The first meeting did not go well. "I felt he was trying to push his book on us first, before we met Snowden," the director says. "I don't respond to that kind of stuff. I said, 'We've got to meet him, and we'll talk about that afterwards.' So I walked out, and Moritz continued negotiating with him. I saw Snowden within a day or two."

Although Snowden wasn't necessarily ready to agree to a Hollywood movie based on his years working for the CIA, NSA and security contractor Booz Allen Hamilton – after all, this was January 2014, just seven months after he fled the US and turned whistleblower – he warmed to the idea over a series of meetings with Stone. By June that year, the filmmaker had committed to the project, bringing on co-writer Kieran Fitzgerald, with whom he had previously collaborated on an unrealised project, and who at the time was in Berlin working on an HBO pilot about the world of hacktivism. "The conversation kept going," says Stone. "Edward would trust us more and more. It warmed up, and I would trust him. It was an amazing story. I went back ultimately nine times."

Borman, who financed the development of the screenplay by securing an advance against French rights from Pathé, optioned both Kucherena's novel *Time of the Octopus* ("There were things in it that were quite useful") and *The Snowden Files*, a factual account by the *Guardian* journalist Luke Harding. Seeking production finance in the US, he believed he'd found it at Brett Ratner and James

Packer's RatPac Entertainment, whose recent credits include *The Revenant* and *Sully*. But, Borman says, "Without getting into details, Mr Packer is not a US citizen, and has a lot of interests in the US, and was clearly advised that it would not please the US government if he financed the film." (When Borman eventually received German financing, and set up a single-purpose company to make *Snowden*, he cheekily called it KrautPack.)

Meanwhile, Sony had optioned *No Place to Hide*, a book about the Snowden affair by the American radical journalist Glenn Greenwald. Stone and Borman had been down that road before with *Alexander* (2004), when they were racing against Baz Luhrmann's rival – and still unmade – film about the Macedonian conqueror, and were not keen to land in the same place. But luck was on their side.

Borman says, "If you read the WikiLeaks from Sony, you will see how Amy Pascal and everybody at Sony reacted when we bought the other book, there was a big exchange about what is happening to their project. They realised that they couldn't make it, with Oliver and me already that far down the line. We also knew that they would never get access to Snowden as well as we did, and I think they had no director on it."

*Film executives would love the screenplay, and then they'd send it upstairs to the board of directors – and the answer was no*



In fact, when RatPac suddenly lost interest in *Snowden*, Sony emerged as the most likely saviour, since the studio had a proven interest in this topic. “I believe that they really wanted to make it,” Borman says, “and I know from Amy at that time that she liked our script. But the Broccolis were the producers on the Greenwald film, and were renegotiating with MGM on the Bond series, which is also in the [Sony] hack. Sony had no appetite to piss off the Broccolis and say, ‘We’re doing the Stone *Snowden*.’”

While Stone was wary of finding himself in a parallel-development scenario, he also had concerns about taking on another real-life subject, having learnt from his numerous experiences of the pitfalls. “*The Doors* [1991] was one of the worst. I had tremendous difficulties on that script with Ray Manzarek, who was the founding Doors member. He was just jealous and angry, and didn’t want the film to be made. He had his own script written by a kooky friend of his. He wanted *The Doors* to get the credit much more than Jim Morrison. And then of course the *JFK* [1991] experience, Jim Garrison was in the last year of his life, so that was extremely difficult too. Every one of these things. I dealt with Ron Kovic on *Born on the Fourth of July* [1989], Le Ly Hayslip on *Heaven & Earth* [1993], Richard Boyle on *Salvador* [1986]...

“Because of what I’ve been through with this biography business, you have to be very responsible: this man is alive, he’s a criminal in the eyes of the government, I felt a tremendous sense of burden. At times the arguments with my co-writer were extensive.”

Borman adds, “We tried for years to do a film on Bob Marley, but never got it together with the Marley family and everybody who has rights on that one. So Oliver was of course cautious, and only when it became really clear that Edward would cooperate did he decide this is not going to be a fictional film, we’re going to base it on as much truth as we can.”

Meanwhile, with a cast led by Joseph Gordon-Levitt and Shailene Woodley, the film was financed out of Germany with pre-sales, German subsidy and some equity. Indie distributor Open Road bought US rights. “The other studios, if you go through them, you know why it might be difficult,” says Borman. “RatPac had a deal with Warner Brothers so that made it difficult there. Murdoch was clearly not a friend of this and had publicly stated how much he hated Mr Snowden, so Fox was not an option. It’s not a Disney movie. Paramount was interested at a certain point, but then for inexplicable reasons dropped out too. I’m not surprised: Sumner [Redstone] doesn’t seem to be one who would be on Edward’s side either. And Universal had no slots at that time.”

Stone adds, “Film executives would love the screenplay, and then they’d send it upstairs to the board of directors types who run these companies. And of course the answer was no – too controversial. A lot of these big companies have mergers coming up, like AT&T is about to purchase Warners. AT&T is a collaborator [with the NSA]. When you have an AT&T running a film company, you might as well lock it up and throw away the key.”

**i** *Snowden* is released on 9 December and is reviewed on page 90

## THE NUMBERS I, DANIEL BLAKE

By Charles Gant

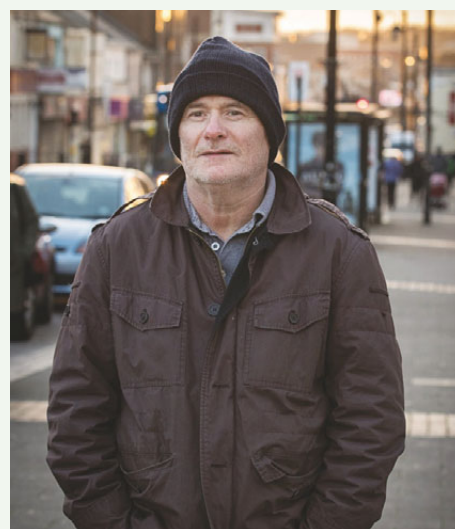
A film about a late-middle-aged Geordie carpenter struggling with the British benefits system may not sound like one of Ken Loach’s more commercially appealing efforts – at least compared with, say, the whisky caper *The Angels’ Share*, which distributor eOne was able to market as a mainstream comedy in Scotland, ultimately achieving just shy of £2 million in the UK and Ireland.

But after seeing an unfinished version of *I, Daniel Blake* in March, two months before the film’s Cannes Palme d’Or triumph, eOne boss Alex Hamilton was inspired to go for broke. “I came out saying, ‘We just need to get as many people to see this film as possible,’” he says. “Our job is getting people to see our films, but in this instance getting people to see this film I think has a residual value outside the box office and any financial benefit to us.”

Helped by substantial investment from the BFI Distribution Fund, eOne was able to enter into a big promotional partnership with Trinity Mirror Group to present a series of screening programmes. “We very definitely wanted to take it beyond the received metropolitan audience or the review-driven audience, and overall I think we got the film seen by about 40,000 people before we opened,” Hamilton says. “We had screenings with Unite, Shelter, Odeon. We came with a diverse range of partners. And hats off to Odeon, they committed to play this film pretty much across their entire circuit. They felt that the film was pretty special.”

The distributor also hired five regional marketing officers in Scotland, the North-East, the North-West, the Midlands and Bristol to mobilise social awareness – “We didn’t necessarily get specialist film marketers, we got people who might have some knowledge of communities and constituencies that we would want to reach.”

With the Labour Party, Momentum and Jeremy Corbyn picking up on the film as a rallying cry against austerity Britain and



Dave Johns in the title role of *I, Daniel Blake*

the cruelty of benefits cuts, *I, Daniel Blake* was defiantly presented as an issue film – a positioning that might alienate some potential audience members but serve as an inspiration to many more. And eOne successfully spilled the coverage from the culture pages on to the mainstream news agenda – delivering non-paid-for media valued by eOne’s media intelligence agency at £10.25 million, “which obviously dwarfs the amount we would have spent on above-the-line media,” says Hamilton.

With £2.84 million box office for *I, Daniel Blake* after five weeks on release, eOne now has its sights set on awards season – aiming to honour a director who hasn’t been nominated for the Best British Film Bafta since 1998’s *My Name Is Joe*. Hamilton says, “A great British filmmaker has made a great British film, and just because it doesn’t fit the template of movies that tend to do well at the Baftas, there’s no reason why we shouldn’t give it a push. I keep saying to everyone else here, ‘What’s the British film this year that stops this winning?’, and no one has given me a fully compelling answer.”

### KEN LOACH AT THE UK/IRELAND BOX OFFICE

Film	Year	Gross
The Wind That Shakes the Barley	2006	£3,906,765
I, Daniel Blake	2016	£2,835,988*
The Angels’ Share	2012	£1,975,736
Looking for Eric	2009	£1,314,489
My Name Is Joe	1998	£949,228
Land and Freedom	1995	£889,640
Sweet Sixteen	2002	£852,178
Jimmy’s Hall	2014	£542,849
Ae Fond Kiss	2004	£456,362
Carla’s Song	1997	£326,480

\*gross at press time



FISAHARA

## A CULTURAL DESERT



Shine a light: FiSahara, now in its 13th edition, was established as a means to communicate the plight of Sahrawi refugees to an indifferent world

At a remote festival in southern Algeria, cinema is being put to use as a weapon of resistance – but can it really save the Sahrawis?

**By Alex Dudok de Wit**

Somewhere in the teeming Sahrawi refugee camps of southern Algeria, there lives a young girl named Cinema. She was born during the inaugural FiSahara film festival, which is held annually in the remotest of the camps. This year, as I pay my first visit, the girl and the festival turn 13.

Cinema – the medium – is relatively new to the Sahrawis. Their homeland is in the contested territory of Western Sahara, the resource-rich tip of the desert that stretches to the Atlantic. As a Spanish colony, the region was home to a number of cinemas that screened Egyptian dramas to crowds of attentive locals. But as in most of colonial Africa, the indigenous people played no part in film production.

When Spain abruptly withdrew in 1975, Morocco invaded, invoking historical claims to the region. The Sahrawis, until recently a ragtag group of nomadic tribes, swiftly organised a national resistance movement fronted by a militia. To everyone's surprise they fought the Moroccans to a stalemate, which was cemented in 1991 by a UN-brokered ceasefire.

The conflict split the Sahrawi population: today, some live under Moroccan occupation in Western Sahara, while the rest remain confined in the refugee camps, on the other side of a 2,700km wall and parallel minefield built by Morocco. In another sense, however, it forged a national culture. Newly conscious of themselves as a united people fighting for independence, the Sahrawis set about the business of statecraft. The leadership created a Ministry of Information and a national archive in the camps, and called on reporters – chief among them the late Abidin Kaid Saleh, who was the first to answer the call – to film the war effort for posterity. From the start, Sahrawi cinema was a political endeavour.

It took outsiders to crystallise it into something resembling an industry. In 2002, a Spanish nonprofit invited Peruvian filmmaker Javier Corcuera to the camps, hoping to induce him to shoot a documentary. Instead, Corcuera proposed a festival. Over three decades, the camps had evolved into a sort of state-in-waiting, complete with a functioning government, police force and thriving market economy. What the Sahrawis needed was a bridge, a means to communicate their plight to the indifferent world. A coalition of international backers was assembled, and FiSahara, the world's only film festival in a refugee camp, was born. An affiliated film school named after Abidin Kaid Saleh followed in 2011.

I am reading about 13-year-old Cinema in

the festival brochure on a chartered flight to the camps. Around me sits an eclectic group of some 250 festivalgoers: organisers, actors, filmmakers, journalists, activists, politicians, musicians and clowns, most of them Spanish, many tattooed. There is a carnivalesque vibe. The brochure reads more like a revolutionary pamphlet than a film magazine, its pages splashed with rousing slogans such as "Toward victory forever, President Abdelaziz!" and "The Sahrawi people will never walk alone!" In her introduction, festival director María Carrión spells out FiSahara's creed: "The Sahrawi people have chosen audiovisuals as their weapons... Our task is to help them get those images to those who have the power to end the conflict."

Dakhla, the host camp, is a sand-scoured cluster of tents and adobe houses. To reach it, we drive for three hours in an armed convoy through a patch of the Sahara known as 'the devil's garden'. This is not the desert of camels and rolling dunes, but of rusting Mercs and flat scrubland. Almost nothing grows here, and the 30,000 inhabitants are largely dependent on foreign aid. Two outdoor pop-up screens rise above the roofs in the centre; guests stay with local families. It is the most improbable setting for a film festival I have ever seen.

Every evening punters gather on the blankets spread out beneath the screens. People come and go, chat and smoke, sometimes with their



backs to the film. During a showing of *Kung Fu Panda* (2008), I have a long conversation about North African geopolitics with a wizened man who describes himself as a philosophical poet. It isn't always clear who is here for the films and who for the company.

This year's theme is 'Occupied Peoples: Memory and Resistance'. The programme is divided roughly four ways: international films, docs on the Western Sahara conflict, films made by Sahrawis, and straight-up entertainment. The first category covers an eclectic range of socially conscious films from recent years, mostly from or about the Third World. The standout film is *Sonita* (2015), Rokhsareh Ghaem Maghami's thrilling documentary about an Afghan teen who dreams of becoming a rapper, to the horror of her conservative family. In the tradition of the best Iranian directors, Ghaem Maghami is concerned not only with her subject's life but also with how the act of filming influences it (in this case, drastically).

Other highlights include *Forgotten Bird of Paradise* (2009), British filmmaker Dominic Brown's striking undercover report on the West Papuan independence movement; and the recent *Desert Fire*, a documentary short about ConIFA – the Fifa of stateless peoples. Following the Kurdistan team's bid to win the World Cup, the film poignantly shows how sport can provide a focus for patriotism during a national struggle for recognition, although it dodges the political question of who qualifies. (The United Koreans of Japan made the cut; I searched in vain for Cornwall.) A product of the new partnership between the *Guardian* and the Bertha Foundation (a FiSahara backer), it bodes well for the rest of the series.

The festival's second strand consists of documentaries about the Western Sahara. Ever since the early days of the war with Morocco, which Mauritanian filmmaker Med Hondo chronicled in a pair of lyrical documentaries, the region has received a steady trickle of sympathetic filmmakers from abroad (generally Spain). The most high-profile such doc is *Sons of the Clouds: The Last Colony* (2012), produced by Javier Bardem, who has taken up the Sahrawi cause of late.

Those on show at this year's edition favour a conventional made-for-TV documentary style, mixing talking heads with archive scenes of protests and military manoeuvres. At best, they include footage covertly shot by activists in the occupied territories, reflecting the almost talismanic importance that smartphones have acquired for those Sahrawis living under Moroccan rule. With a few exceptions – a heart-rending portrait of a girl living with diabetes in the camp comes to mind – these films focus on the political situation, inevitably siding with the Sahrawis. Some are powerful, but after a while the law of diminishing returns sets in.

This is not exactly FiSahara's fault. Films that sniff around the Western Sahara issue, raising tough questions and exposing contradictions, are few and far between. In any case the Sahrawi authorities, determined to appear blameless to the international community, would not allow them to be screened in the camps. The fascinating 2009 documentary *Stolen*, which investigates the

## *This is a desert of rusting Mercs and flat scrubland. It is the most improbable setting for a film festival I have ever seen*

enduring practice of slavery in Sahrawi society, is a case in point: the authorities first detained the filmmakers, then sent a representative to publicly denounce the film at a screening in Australia.

Unfortunately, the result is a rather monotonous line-up of worthy anti-Morocco polemics. Let's be clear: Morocco's occupation is outrageously unjust, and it has shown up the weakness of the UN, which has consistently failed to deliver a promised referendum on independence. Insofar as they raise awareness of this little-known conflict, these documentaries deserve praise. At its best, however, cinema is a tool of inquiry and subversion; by contrasting different films, festivals are a forum for dialogue and debate. These aspects are often lacking at FiSahara. There is the added irony that it is a festival which was founded in order to speak truth to power, yet cannot transcend its own political constraints.

More intriguing are the films made by the Sahrawis themselves. Most of these are produced in the festival's workshops. Over four days, willing locals study the basics of filmmaking with visiting dignitaries or Sahrawis trained abroad. Mauritanian actor Salem Dendou, one of this year's teachers, explains that he gets his dozen-odd pupils to brainstorm a subject, then guides them through the scriptwriting and shooting process. They use cameras and smartphones to produce a two-minute short. The most promising students can then apply for a two-year course at the nearby Abidin Kaid Saleh Audiovisual School, whose graduation films are also shown at the festival.

The films tend to deal with political or social issues: landmine victims, unemployment, emigration to Spain. The setting is generally domestic, although some films venture out into the blazing sun. One ends with a wide shot of sand dunes poetically scored to the sound of lapping waves: the ocean denied to the Sahrawis. While the subjects are locally specific, many of the shorts throb with a Third Cinema-style rawness and insurgent energy. The subtext is always clear: oppression is wrong, and cannot last.

Building on earlier efforts by the likes of the University of Roehampton and the charity Sandblast to empower Sahrawis through film, the workshops and school export their films



A screening of Rokhsareh Ghaem Maghami's *Sonita*

via FiSahara's distribution channels to cinemas abroad (the San Sebastian Film Festival is a notable patron). The ultimate aim, Dendou tells me, is to get them screened throughout the Third World. "This century, the people of the Third World prefer to watch than to read," he says. "Cinema can jump borders and link these people in their struggle."

Understandably, the films by and about the Sahrawis draw the biggest local crowds. Rarely do films reflect their audience back at itself, but throughout these screenings people cheer, laugh with recognition, point out their friends on screen. Joining this crowd under the night sky reminds me how sociable cinemagoing can be. By comparison, the international films play to a more muted crowd of mostly foreign visitors. At times, it feels like FiSahara is two festivals.

One could hardly accuse the Spanish organisers of trying to impose an alien political agenda on the refugees. For one thing, they assure me that the programme is drawn up in consultation with a local committee. And their choice of theme is well motivated: the Sahrawi leadership itself has long identified its cause with that of other oppressed nations. In the 1970s, anti-colonial Martinican writer Frantz Fanon was a favourite with the revolutionary cadre. Today, Palestinian flags are ubiquitous in the camps.

Yet few Sahrawis turn out for the films on Kurdistan, West Papua or Palestine. *Concerning Violence* (2014), a searing archive documentary about African liberation movements structured around Fanon's writings, plays to almost nobody. Given the 150,000-strong population of the camps, it's perhaps a surprise that even the Sahrawi films draw only a small minority of locals. At the film school, staff inform us that they sometimes struggle to fill the 20 allotted places on the course.

As the locals remind me, there isn't much to do in the camps – so why isn't cinema exciting greater passions? Carrión points out that the remote and flood-prone Dakhla has recently lost many residents to other camps. Yet even among its remaining inhabitants I detect apathy.

Could it be that, since the ceasefire, the rhetoric of cross-border solidarity has lost its appeal? That conservative elements in this Muslim society resist the appeal of a disruptive new medium, as one local suggests to me? That cinema sits uneasily among Sahrawi cultural traditions, rich in poetry and music but comparatively deficient in the visual arts? Or that the refugees, faced with the grim reality of oppression all year round, would rather just be entertained?

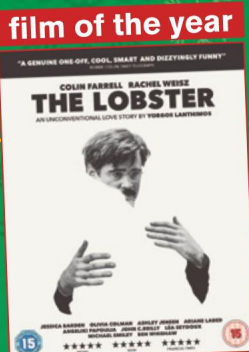
For all the talk of cinema as an international language of resistance, most people here don't speak it yet. If the Sahrawis really have chosen audiovisuals as their weapons, the majority appear to be pacifists. Yet some talk of the renewed hope the festival has given them – I imagine Cinema's parents are among them. In their films, there are flashes of the artistic flair that they will need if they are to make an impact on the world. Perhaps it is ambitious to expect an artform to flourish so soon after taking root in a society, but then FiSahara is not short on ambition. I am keen to see how the festival develops, and with it Sahrawi cinema. ☺



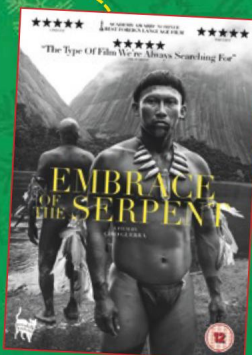
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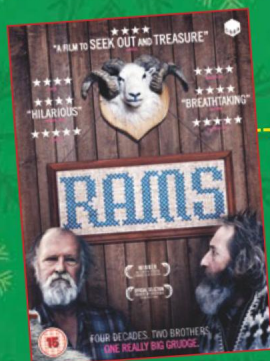
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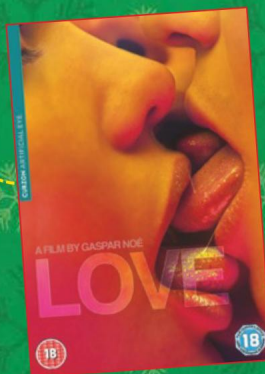
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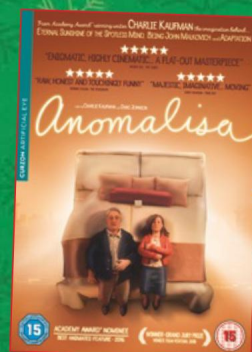
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**SWEET DREAMS**  
Emma Stone plays Mia, an actress on the make who falls for Ryan Gosling's Seb, a jazz musician with dreams of opening his own bar, in Damien Chazelle's *La La Land*





# DANCING WITH THE STARS

*Damien Chazelle's bewitching musical 'La La Land', exploring the romance between two ambitious dreamers in modern-day Los Angeles, might be saturated in the style of its classic Hollywood forebears, but it never loses sight of where the genre might be headed next*

**By Pamela Hutchinson**

***La La Land***, the new film by Damien Chazelle, is a cinematic ghost. This apparition is a movie musical, and it is set in Hollywood, the town that used to make this kind of film all the time, once upon a time. Nowadays, the musical genre is in a very uncertain place, at least as far as American cinema is concerned, which makes *La La Land* a spectre, haunting the scene of its own demise. Many will take one look at *La La Land* and say, "They don't make 'em like that any more," but this expressive film has almost as much to say about the shaky future of the Hollywood musical, as its celebrated past.

In the film, Ryan Gosling and Emma Stone play Seb and Mia, two young wannabes who also find themselves in an uncertain place. Are they living in Los Angeles, or la la land? Are they destined for Hollywood or just living a delusion, hoping for a break that will never come? Seb is a jobbing musician who yearns to achieve greatness in his chosen form of jazz. Mia is an actress, or as Seb unkindly corrects her, a barista who attends a lot of auditions. They meet and fall in love, but the dreams that they are both chasing put their romance to the test. There's not much to the story, but there's more to this film than plot.

Seb and Mia have a strong appreciation for the classics and so does *La La Land*—it is deeply saturated in the style of classic Hollywood musicals and is even shot in richly tinted CinemaScope. In fact, the film





promises a historical sweep of the genre from the very beginning, when a black-and-white square becomes gradually suffused with colour as it widens to its full size. It's a little like watching Ernst Lubitsch's talkie comedy *Ninotchka* (1939) grow into Rouben Mamoulian's *Silk Stockings* (1957), with "glorious Technicolor/ Breathhtaking Cinemascope, and/ Stereophonic sound" – as Cole Porter's lyrics described it. When people dance in *La La Land*, they do so in long-shot, head to toe, just like Fred and Ginger, or Gene Kelly and Cyd Charisse. Mia and the sets are both dressed either in rich primary colours that evoke luminous 1950s Technicolor, or the sugared almond palette of Jacques Demy's *Les Demoiselles de Rochefort* (1967), which shares with *La La Land* a jazzy score and a fragile emotional tone. A gorgeous ballet fantasia sequence includes swift visual allusions to a clatter of beloved predecessors, from *Broadway Melody of 1940* (1940) to *Singin' in the Rain* (1951), *Funny Face* (1956) and *An American in Paris* (1951).

Mia's flat, shared with fellow hopefuls, is plastered with old movie posters. In her bedroom there is a towering portrait of Ingrid Bergman, and more obscure bills featuring Norma Talmadge and Corinne Griffith. Seb, alone in his sparse digs, obsesses over classic jazz records, playing bars over and over to commit them to memory. The film indulges his ambitions by picking him out with a spotlight when he breaks into his own compositions, but Mia gets the real star treatment. She walks past the 'You are the Star' mural at Hollywood and Wilcox, which shows a cohort of movie legends in a cinema staring agog at the real-life passers-by on the pavement as if they are the performers on screen. To seal her fate, she is caught prophetically in the projector's beam at a screening of CinemaScope classic *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955).

Chazelle also took a cue from silent era 'city sympho-

nies', and *La La Land* emphasises its urban setting, revolving around the local industry and making use of real-world locations. It opens with a freeway traffic jam that becomes the scene of a lustrous musical number in which the drivers dance joyfully while singing about the struggle that unites them (and Seb and Mia): the soul-destroying business of trying to make it in show-business. *La La Land* takes an oblique view on Hollywood: the closest we get to a soundstage is a fiery glimpse. The back offices where Mia auditions, spouting cheesy dialogue for grotty-sounding films ("*Dangerous Minds* meets *The OC*") in front of disdainful casting directors, are cramped and unromantic. Seb pays his bills playing Christmas carols and cover versions but dreams of opening a jazz club where aficionados can jam together, because his favourite haunt has been taken over and reopened as a baffling "samba and tapas joint" – he bitterly mangles Oscar Wilde's definition of a cynic by describing LA as a place where people "worship everything and value nothing". Furthermore, the LA Seb and Mia live in no longer exists: the cinema they visit together – the Rialto in Pasadena – and the funicular they ride, both closed down years ago.

Tinseltown may be tarnished, but while Seb and Mia are in love, the film takes on the glamour of their romance. There is pizzazz and even tinsel: swirls of pale spring blossom or fallen russet leaves, a blast of glitter from Mia's hairdryer and, most poetically, a cascade of plastic snow over a swimming pool at a Christmas party. Perhaps if Seb and Mia could stay in love for long enough, or hold on to their fantasies of stardom for long enough, Hollywood could get its groove back.

This is not Chazelle's first musical. His debut feature, the majority of which was made while he was still a film student, was a musical called *Guy and Madeline on a Park Bench* (2009). Like *La La Land* it is a romance spiced up

**ROAD TO SUCCESS**  
*La La Land* (above) takes inspiration from silent era city symphonies, making good use of its urban environment and offering a nostalgic vision of LA



with jazz and tap-dancing, but the Academy Ratio frame, monochrome cinematography and improvisational style summon Jean-Luc Godard rather than Jacques Demy. Chazelle intended *La La Land* to be his next project, but struggled to get funding for it, so in the interim he made *Whiplash* (2014), his hymn to jazz perfectionism, about a young drummer, bullied by his tutor, who sacrifices everything in pursuit of the immaculate tempo.

The contrast between those two films, the tension between improvisational naturalism and rigid perfectionism, is central to *La La Land* – to Seb and Mia's artistic destiny, and to the style of the film itself. The songs in *La La Land*, with music written by Chazelle's partner from *Guy and Madeline*, Justin Hurwitz, and lyrics by Benj Pasek and Justin Paul, are hummable enough to sound like new standards, but the way they are performed in the film is very telling. *La La Land* doesn't just tell us where the Hollywood musical has been, but where it is headed.

The first number, 'Another Day of Sun', is performed by an ensemble, not the leads, so slickly and in such an audacious single shot, that it seems a hymn to the old-school production values of the Hollywood musical – everyone meets their cue, and smiles and dances in perfect synchronisation. It's an extroverted descendant of the transporter bridge dance routine that opens *Les Dames de Rochefort* too. There are high kicks, jazz hands, drums and solos, and the effect is a little more Kids from Fame, crossed with the opening number from *A Chorus Line* (1985), in theme and execution, than Busby Berkeley. From that point on, though, the shell cracks and a little authentic awkwardness enters the picture.

Seb and Mia's romantic Rogers and Astaire moment, high in the Hollywood hills, with the city and its glowing pink sky as a backdrop, comes with 'A Lovely Night'. True to Fred and Ginger's spirit, Seb and Mia, who have barely met, are ready to call the whole thing off and the song is a witty, poignant number in which the lovers deny the sparks flying between them, in the mould of 'A Fine Romance'. But Stone and Gosling are no Rogers and Astaire. Mia even takes off her high heels before they dance, for shame, and the sequence's charm lies in the chemistry between the couple, and their breathy singing – certainly not the precision of their footwork.

Thankfully, their most beautiful dance requires no fancy moves at all; as the pair rise on wires to the ceiling of the planetarium at the Griffith Observatory, the camera-work takes the strain. The visit is inspired by the movie they watch at the Rialto, *Rebel Without a Cause* – when the film combusts, they escape to one of its key locations

– and also by their shared obsession with stars of the non-galactic variety. Like the film's most spectacular musical sequence, towards the end of the film, this moment is entirely mediated through the characters' imagination and guided by their cinematic points of reference. That final musical sequence is the film's postmodern peak: a reimagining of its narrative as if it really were the kind of movie they used to make, as Stone and Gosling re-enact their romance in a series of set pieces inspired by classic musicals. This way the film ends twice, wrapping a 'Hollywood' happy ending culled from movie homages inside a more cynical conclusion, one that is in itself heavily signposted by allusions to *Casablanca* (1942).

Happily for Seb and Mia's clumsy feet, dancing seems to have gone out of style, or at least the show-stopping, finger-clicking perfectionism of the Hollywood chorus line, and the big-name soloists out front. Whereas a Golden Age musical might climax with the stars demonstrating their virtuosity in a series of musical spectacles escalating in grandeur, the key performances here, two piano-led songs, demonstrate a disdain for putting on the ritz. Seb and Mia duet on the song he spends the film perfecting, 'City of Stars', with downcast glances and cracked voices, side by side at the keyboard. Mia performs her 'Audition' number ('Here's to the ones who dream/ Foolish as they may seem') in jumper and jeans, eyes closed in one of those dreary casting-call offices. The emphasis is on the authenticity of the emotion, the construction of the song (Seb has painstakingly composed his; Mia, concentrating intensely, improvises hers on the spot), rather than visual display.

With that, *La La Land* comes bang up to date, by assuming the mode of the 21st-century musical, in which the emphasis has shifted from the 'pure cinema' of a screen filled with geometrically arranged bodies to the aesthetics of authentic live performance, and more often than not a setlist of pre-approved classic tracks. This is the era in which a film directed by Richard Linklater could become the highest-grossing musical comedy. And when that film, *The School of Rock* (2003), in which a slacker teaches a class of kids to emulate the poses of 70s and 80s metal bands, was knocked off the top spot, it was by *Pitch Perfect 2* (2015), in which a group of students perform pop medleys. The climax of both films are rock-gig style talent contest victories that hinge on ideas of musical authenticity: in the former the children triumph by preternaturally impersonating their parents' rock idols, in the latter it's by daring to drop an original composition into a tournament devoted to cover versions.

*Whereas a Golden Age musical might climax with the stars demonstrating their virtuosity in a series of musical spectacles, the key performances here demonstrate a disdain for putting on the ritz*

**THE MUSIC OF TIME**  
*La La Land* delights in referencing classic musicals, including (below, from left) *Broadway Melody of 1940* (1940), *Silk Stockings* (1957) and *Les Dames de Rochefort* (1967)







*Imagine a musical that wasn't about musicals at all, but the world outside the cinema instead, a film that used the genre to explore more than its own glittery navel*



Between those two films, while the kids were eating up the drama club hi-jinks of *High School Musical* (2006) and its sequels, TV brought the musical back to the small screen with *Glee*, which featured weekly mash-ups of showtunes and pop hits (often a cappella) against a backdrop of teen angst and camp comedy for six series from 2009-15. Doubtless *Pitch Perfect* (2012), a female-led movie about an a cappella troupe, would not have been greenlit without it. More musical shows appeared in *Glee*'s wake, mixing soap opera storylines with stage-bound performance interludes, including *Smash* (2012-13) and *Nashville* (2012-). Rachel Bloom's Netflix series *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* (2015-) is a more ambitious, explicit development of the trend, a tongue-in-cheek show that combines sitcom plotting with clever spoofs of pop songs and showtunes.

On stage, in Broadway and the West End, the heartbeat of the jukebox musical, so popular in the Golden Age, was jumpstarted by the phenomenal success of the ABBA-soundtracked *Mamma Mia!* (first performed in 1999, still running in London's West End, and filmed by Phyllida Lloyd in 2008). From *Moulin Rouge!* (2001) to *Sunshine on Leith* (2013) cinematic versions continue to emerge, and will probably remain a staple as long as Saturday-night TV talent shows keep cover versions as a cornerstone of popular entertainment. Familiar 'pre-sold' tunes are still an enticement for audiences, even if the resulting films rely on irony as much as nostalgia.

The new musicals push credibility over screen spectacle. Irish writer-director John Carney established a new genre of indie musical with *Once* (2007), a sweet romance starring two professional musicians, Glen Hansard and Markéta Irglová, with limited acting experience. Filmed for a tiny budget on the streets of Dublin, the film became a box-office hit, and Hansard and Irglová's duet 'Falling Slowly' won the Oscar for Best Original Song. Carney has returned to the genre twice since, with the schoolboy musical *Sing Street* (2016) and an American film *Begin Again* (2013), starring Keira Knightley and Mark Ruffalo. *Begin Again* is immersed in the record industry and has a scene that is the antithesis of the Hollywood musical, the anti-*On the Town* (1949): Knightley and Ruffalo fall for each other in a music-backed sequence on the streets of New York. Their taste in music is Hollywood enough ('Luck Be a Lady' from *Guys and Dolls*, 1955, and 'As Time Goes By' from *Casablanca*) but the scene is not. These earnest musos have their earphones plugged into Knightley's phone, and their physical expression is limited to nodding heads, lip-synching and blushing over "guilty

pleasures". As with Seb and Mia's crowning numbers, music is best enjoyed privately, not on stage in front of a chorus line.

If TV's enthusiasm for the musical format can overcome Hollywood's reluctance to commit to a showstopper, Anna Kendrick (beyond *Pitch Perfect*, in stage transfers such as *Into the Woods* and *The Last Five Years*) and Channing Tatum (from *Hail, Caesar!*'s retro pastiche to the *Step Up* and *Magic Mike* movies) have shown skill and willingness to sing and dance. *La La Land* will no doubt remind many audiences of the pleasures of the Golden Age, ever-expanding sets, technical accomplishment and all. But if authenticity is the new razzle-dazzle, what does the future hold for Hollywood? *La La Land* offers a stark choice for Seb, who must decide between his musical credibility and the riches represented by a journey into jazz-pop fusion hell with a former rival played by John Legend. While he eventually chooses the former, it's tricky to escape the feeling that his club is co-opting black music and selling it to a white middle-class audience – as many a Hollywood musical has done before him – and, like the hero of *Whiplash*, his success comes at a moral cost.

For Mia, when movie-stardom arrives, it doesn't look anything like her vintage fantasies. It's barely Hollywood at all, but filming in Europe, living on the East Coast and developing scripts through improvisational workshops. The fact that when thrown together by chance in a dark room, Seb and Mia share the same Hollywood-moulded fantasy of how things might have been, suggests that their heads are still somewhere in the clouds after all. Also, perhaps, that Hollywood has not laid all its ghosts to rest just yet.

Imagine a musical that wasn't about musicals at all, but the world outside the cinema instead, a film that used the genre to explore more than its own glittery navel. *Hamilton*, currently reigning on Broadway, tackles America's past, present and pop culture head-on; Danny Boyle and Frank Cottrell-Boyce's opening ceremony for the London 2012 Olympics did the same for Britain but with arguably grander designs. So why shouldn't the cinema follow suit? As the headlines increasingly recall the political and economic challenges that shadowed the rise of the musical in the 1930s, the time may be right for a passionate, irony-free throwback to the Golden Age – a *Gold Diggers of 2016*. It's just a matter of shedding some inhibitions, and learning to tap-dance. ☺



**La La Land is released in UK cinemas on 13 January and will be reviewed in our next issue**

#### SHALL WE DANCE?

Hollywood has been reluctant to commit to musicals of late, although Channing Tatum in *Hail, Caesar!* (above left) and Anna Kendrick in *The Last Five Years* (above right) have shown a willingness to sing and dance, and *High School Musical* (above centre) and its sequels have given the genre a box-office boost





**Gene therapy:** Gene Kelly was at his peak in the period when he was married to the actress Betsy Blair and working with the great director Stanley Donen

## MOTION SLICKNESS

*There was always a little bit of the gangster about Gene Kelly, but it was precisely this tough guy persona that grabbed our attention, delighting us with just what a male body could do*

**By Dan Callahan**

In 1960 Gene Kelly choreographed a dance for the Paris Opera called 'Pas de Dieux', but he never performed it himself, perhaps because it was too personal. It has two men fight over a woman in the pugnacious Kelly style: they are cocky and springy and low to the ground, with their bent knees set far apart. The Kelly figure in this dance vanquishes his rival and then brings an adoring but rebellious woman into line after a conversation in movement that gets very heated and sexual.

'Pas de Dieux' says more about his abiding interest in the limits of competitive male friendship than anything else he ever created. It gets downright brutal sometimes, just as it does in a different way in *It's Always Fair Weather* (1955), which was the last movie

Kelly co-directed with his friend Stanley Donen. Most of Kelly's best work was created during the period when he was married to the actress Betsy Blair and when he was working with Donen. Blair had been a teenager when she married Kelly, and for a time both she and Donen had a worshipful and uncritical attitude to him. It was only when Blair and Donen started to see him as a fallible human being that both the marriage and the friendship broke up in the late 1950s, and so 'Pas de Dieux' feels like a wish fulfilment in which Kelly is trying to mend that breach and make it come out right. 'Pas de Dieux' is a key to Kelly's work and to his overall creative personality – to both its very sexy beauty and its romantic limits.







Happy again: Kelly embraces the elements in the classic sequence in *Singin' in the Rain* (1951)



Hello sailor: Kelly performing alongside Jerry Mouse in *Anchors Aweigh* (1945)



Born in Pittsburgh in 1912, Kelly spent his life trying to prove that dancing could be an athletic endeavour like any other sport, and this was most directly expressed in a documentary he shot for NBC in 1958 called *Dancing: A Man's Game*, in which he showed the boxer Sugar Ray Robinson and the baseball player Mickey Mantle in dance-like movement. Kelly repeatedly said in interviews that he had really wanted to be a shortstop for the Pittsburgh Pirates baseball team, but his mother signed him up for dancing school at the age of eight and he took a lot of grief from the neighbourhood boys because of it. The perception that dancing wasn't manly was something that profoundly bothered Kelly, and so sometimes he overcompensated in his movies, playing 'the woman' in a dance with another man in a gruesomely simpering way.

He first came to prominence on Broadway in 1940, playing a heel and wise guy in the title role in *Pal Joey*, a musical that provided him with a persona that he basically stuck to for most of his career. Kelly had a scar on his left cheek that lent him an air of menace even when he was smiling his megawatt smile. He began losing his hair early and initially resorted to some very convincing toupees before switching later on to a far less convincing full wig. Even at his most cheerful, Kelly seems intimidatingly tough on screen, with a sadistic streak lying just beneath the surface which threatens to come to the fore if you were ever to test him.

His first part in movies was opposite Judy Garland at MGM, playing a selfish guy who eventually turns noble in *For Me and My Gal* (1942), but it was in *Cover Girl* (1944) that he first displayed his ambitions as a dancer with the 'Alter Ego' number, in which he danced with a ghostly replica of himself. His friendly rival Fred Astaire sometimes poked gentle fun at Kelly's "concept" dances, which grew more and more elaborate until they reached a climax with the long ballet that ends *An American in Paris* (1951).

Kelly and Astaire danced together in *Ziegfeld Follies* (1945), and the macho choreography in their number favours Kelly, though Astaire's hand movements here are far more dynamic. Astaire sweated just as much as Kelly in the rehearsal room, if not more, but his work is pitched to look effortless, as if the complex wonders of his dancing were just as natural as someone walking jauntily down a street. Kelly is continually trying to make us feel the effort of his dancing, the hard labour of moving his body through space. He makes the law of gravity seem erotic.

Astaire is an airy figure, yet his rock-solid torso remains unmoving as he makes slicing movements with his arms and legs.





We'll always have Paris: Kelly and Leslie Caron in Vincente Minnelli's *An American in Paris* (1951)

Kelly is always close to the ground and moves his torso momentarily, just as he does everything else. He looks very at ease doing a Russian kazaki dance with the Nicholas Brothers in Vincente Minnelli's *The Pirate* (1948), in which he also does sporty push-up movements and somehow slides across the floor on his calves.

Kelly could embody sexual urges on screen in a very pure way. During the Toulouse-Lautrec section of the ballet in *An American in Paris*, he dances in a cream-coloured, form-fitting suit and blatantly displays his body in a deliberately contained and formal fashion. Little hand movements indicate his need for release, and this is punctuated with a brief, provocative shake of his buttocks. When he sees Leslie Caron in a blonde wig, Kelly does what he always does to indicate sexual arousal: he makes his legs as stiff as possible and does a little spring-like movement.

In *The Pirate*, Kelly dances to the song 'Nina' in pants so tight and high-waisted that he seems to be all lower body, all carnal, and this is only amplified in the long nightmare ballet sequence he plays in tight cut-off shorts, and in which he

seems to be taunting both Judy Garland and Minnelli – and the audience – with the beauty of his thighs. Dancers tend to have a more objective relationship to their bodies as a result of spending so much time observing themselves in the mirror during rehearsals, and so Kelly's flaunting of his body in these two Minnelli movies feels not unappealingly narcissistic but somehow both generous and boastful.

Probably Kelly's most neglected movie is Gregory La Cava's *Living in a Big Way* (1947), in which he does a dance on a construction site for a group of kids. The relaxed manner he displays there can also be seen when he dances for children in *An American in Paris*, to the song 'I Got Rhythm', and again when he performs alongside a cartoon Jerry Mouse in *Anchor's Aweigh* (1945) – perhaps because cartoons and kids didn't pose a challenge to him in the way an adult female love interest or a male friend might.

As a romantic dance partner, Kelly can sometimes seem a little shy. When he performs with Caron to 'Love Is Here to Stay' in *An American in Paris*, he tenderly places her head on his

*Kelly's flaunting of his body in 'An American in Paris' feels not unappealingly narcissistic but both generous and boastful*



Fred Astaire (left) and Kelly in *Ziegfeld Folies* (1945)



shoulder and does lots of slow walking with her, as if he has to restrain himself. Kelly's very best dances are the ones he does by himself, for at heart he is a solitary figure, unable or unwilling to let go of the idea that he is a tough guy you don't want to mess with.

Kelly had a temperature of 103 degrees when he shot the song and dance in a downpour in *Singin' in the Rain* (1951) that became his signature number. It took a while to make sure the puddles splashed as much as he wanted them to, and the work was slow, but everyone involved knew they had created something special. I interviewed Betsy Blair when her memoir *The Memory of All That* came out in 2003, and she vividly remembered the filming of this classic sequence, which she referred to as "the famous one, the really great one", with a little physical shiver that was partly reverential and partly mocking.

Kelly is alone for much of the title song number in *Singin' in the Rain*, which is one of the most unalloyed expressions of joy on film, especially when Kelly takes off his hat, and the camera moves in as he closes his eyes and sings, "C'mon with the rain... I've a smile on my face," with his light, high voice. He is also alone in the difficult number he does on roller skates in *It's Always Fair Weather* (1955), in which he has only passers-by for an audience. And Kelly is entirely alone in one of his very best dances, the gentle nighttime tap number in *Summer Stock* (1950), in which he builds a routine out of just a squeaking floorboard and a newspaper.

There is nothing fancy in this quiet dance in *Summer Stock*, nothing conceptual. It is just Kelly and his creativity in a deserted auditorium as he makes small and beautifully defined movements. Finally, it seems like Kelly is making love to the floorboard in a way that is a little mocking but also a little serious, before he breaks out his full pin-wheeling, cocky pyrotechnics and rips up the newspaper into smaller and smaller pieces with his feet as he dances. Along with 'Pas de Dieux', this scene is the purest expression of Kelly's creative character.

Nothing was quite the same for Kelly after his break with Donen and with Blair. An all-dance film he directed called *Invitation to the Dance* (1956) was not a success, and so he turned to directing comedies before doing a kind of tribute to his past in Jacques Demy's *Les Demoiselles de Rochefort* (1967). Kelly is thinner in that movie than he was in his heyday and not as cocky physically, but he manages to offer a recapitulation of some of his best movement styles in a 'one more time' sort of way that is extremely touching. Kelly has become a



Kelly (left) with Stanley Donen

legendary figure here, a link to a Hollywood past that has started to fade away.

Throughout his career Kelly also appeared in non-musical roles, the best of which is surely his weak-willed, good-for-nothing husband to Deanna Durbin in Robert Siodmak's *Christmas Holiday* (1944), but he felt wasted when not in musicals and not in motion. Later in life he was offered the role of the emcee in *Cabaret* (1972), and

*Finally he breaks out his full pin-wheeling pyrotechnics and rips up the paper into smaller and smaller pieces as he dances*



Summer Stock (1950)



Kelly at home with his wife Betsy Blair

seriously considered it. Take a moment to imagine him in that role in that film. It's a frightening prospect, isn't it?

For Kelly had it in him to be as showbiz nasty and sleazy and taunting as he would have needed to be in *Cabaret*, and he might have transformed the film into something far more unsettling. Imagine Kelly doing the 'Money' number with Liza Minnelli, the daughter of his first movie co-star Judy Garland. A partnership like that might have been disturbing in the best possible way, but Kelly turned down the challenge because at the time he felt his children needed him.

As an older man, Kelly was a cheerful promoter of his work at MGM, and the work of others, and when he got the AFI Lifetime Achievement Award in 1985 he was still insisting that he had only started dancing to meet girls and that he really should have been a shortstop for the Pittsburgh Pirates. His last credit was in a Joan Collins TV miniseries called *Sins* (1986) in which his character is thrown from a balcony, and so at least he got to end his career in motion.

Kelly had done a lot of smiling on screen, but it was a smile that often felt like a sign saying, "Watch out." The real Kelly is briefly visible right before the start of the 'Broadway Melody' number in *Singin' in the Rain*: by himself, unsmiling, competitive, a taskmaster, a leader, a choreographer. There was a little bit of the gangster about him sometimes, and he never looked right in a suit, as Astaire did, because it felt like his body wanted to burst free of it. His thick, tree-trunk-like presence is still there on film, moving in its commanding way, making us his hero-worshippers while also giving us the pleasure of seeing just what a very male body can do. ☺



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# A LESSON IN AWKWARD

Following the toe-curlingly acute comedy of *'The Misadventures of Awkward Black Girl'*, Issa Rae is back with *'Insecure'*, but has her zany, idiosyncratic brilliance been diluted during the transition from web series to mainstream TV?

By Gaylene Gould



**Internet star Issa Rae's popular web series** *The Misadventures of Awkward Black Girl* (2011-13) begins with an episode called 'Stop Sign'. In it we meet plain-faced J (played by Rae) in a beat-up car navigating traffic etiquette. When repeatedly stopping next to someone you know at red signals and stop signs, how long do you keep up the half-hearted smile and wave? Do you pretend to hear when they shout at you? Do you mime being on the phone? As in real life, the scene goes on long enough to make your toes curl. This opening instalment is low-budget practical and comedically on point. "For any ordinary person," J explains in voiceover, "the stop sign is a simple sign of direction, but for me it's the epitome of social misdirection." She bears two crosses: she's awkward AND black

— "the two worst things anyone could be". Over 24 episodes she guides us through life as a twentysomething wrestling with social mores on the fringes of adult life.

Comedy, of all genres, has been particularly successful at finding a wider audience for the black experience — through broad-appeal family sitcoms, from *The Jeffersons* (1975-85) to *Black-ish* (2014-), and more recent, edgier offerings such as Donald Glover's *Atlanta* (2016-), an elliptical look at life on the lower rungs of hip-hop's celebrity ladder, and, in Britain, Michaela Coel's dirty-mouthed *Chewing Gum* (2015-). *Misadventures* encroaches on territory usually occupied by older Jewish men — existential comedy. Rae has said she was inspired to write the series after studying Jerry Seinfeld and Larry David — come-





**RAE'S A LAUGH**  
Issa Rae as Issa in *Insecure* (above), this year's big-budget HBO follow-up to her hit web series *Misadventures of Awkward Black Girl* (right)

dians who amble through the musing mind, revealing frailties most of us are too cool to admit to. The milieu explored is often recognisable yet hilariously heightened: *Misadventures* reveals the murky, multicultural, zero-hours-contract world that America refuses to advertise.

J works in a call-centre for a dodgy diet pill company, Gutbusters. She's surrounded by a cast of madcap colleagues, including a delightful Rachel Dolezal-style race-switching boss, all skull-exposed cornrows and daishikis. J herself is no poster-child for normal. After her boyfriend dumped her, J shaved her head and has taken to composing violent raps in her bedroom.

Essentially, *Misadventures* is a black *The Office* (2001-03). But where David Brent suffers a self-awareness deficiency, J has been dished an excruciating double dose. We watch with shame-riddled compulsion as she writhes around in a perpetual state of embarrassment.

In an Escher-like episode called 'The Long Corridor' Rae brings to life the horror of walking past the same person over and over in a passageway until the standard string of polite greetings is exhausted. You wish the other person would die rather than face another awkward meeting. "Does this girl live in the hallway?" J screams internally.

At some time or other, we've all walked down that metaphoric corridor, haven't we? Those places where social constructs threaten to crash down and expose our inept, bewildered selves. *Misadventures* lives within those terrible moments.

Race and gender are two of those constructs that both protect and stifle us. At least since *The Birth of a Nation* (the D.W. Griffith 1915 version, not Nate Parker's recent film), images of black people and women have been a public not a private matter. Young black women are particularly schooled in how not to present themselves for fear of negative labelling and the message often received is to tone down natural instincts in order to fit into a Eurocentric norm. Dress, style and behaviour become important signifiers. If you need evidence, follow the never-ending debates around the politics of black women's hair. Letting one's hair grow natural and unkempt could, according to some, in a single style bring down the entire race – but that's what J does. She's tomboy plain too, the kind of woman used to going unnoticed. Most of the storylines show her struggling with ideas of femininity. She's an uncool, terrible flirt. The only romantic activity that makes any sense is with White Jay – an awkward pairing, because this is socially segregated America and White Jay is, well, white.

This unstyled character gained a fervent following among African American women, rather in the way Lena Dunham warmed the hearts of white women by waddling down a posh New England sidewalk in a bikini in her hit show *Girls* (2012-). As it did with Dunham, HBO took Rae into its stable. With its reputation for encouraging quality writing and complex representations, HBO looked like the perfect partner. If anyone was going to understand Rae's vision, it would.

The part of the TV watching world that I belong to waited impatiently. What impact would the move from a self-produced, crowdfunded internet platform to a major industry player have on Rae's writing? *Misadventures* was principally made for and funded by a niche audience. Would the move from the margins to the centre prompt Rae to tone down the honest comic instincts that made her breakthrough such a refreshing joy? The show was finally aired this year under the name *Insecure*. Maybe the clue was in the title change. Men are rarely

labelled 'insecure'. It is one of those nebulous feminised terms, like 'hysterical'.

Rae explained her intention for the show in an interview with *Fast Company* magazine. "It seems to me [on television], we're either extremely magical, or we're extremely flawless. But we don't get to just be boring. Like, it's a privilege to be able to be boring and not answer questions like, 'What do you think about this shooting?' and 'How are you overcoming all of these obstacles?'... What about the times that I'm just kicking it with friends at brunch?"

The 'we' referred to here is black women. When it comes to black characterisations, boring is a radical concept. Black people are often placed at the edges of the frame (the sidekick) or presented negatively (the villain). As a defining character trait, though, 'boring' needs some qualifying. Whose version of boring do we mean, and does boring make for good television?

*Insecure* focuses on two women, one of them played by (and named) Issa. Both women are trying to find security – which in this context means finding the perfect man. Issa has a man, Lawrence, but he lacks drive. She is tempted, then, when a hot ex arrives back on the scene. Meanwhile, her friend Molly has worked her way up from a working-class background to become a lawyer and is now trying, with little success, to snare a man who embodies the New Her.

Issa's life in *Insecure* is like a gentrified version of J's in *Misadventures*. Her tomboyish looks now have a stylist's touch. Her hair is natural but now neatly coiffed. She



still vents by rapping, but now she's pretty good at it. Her job has been ramped up a notch, too. The call-centre has been replaced by a charity for inner-city black kids, and she is the only black worker. The multicultural world of *Misadventures* is now predominantly white. This gives rise to some interesting and potentially funny moments of dissonance, as when Molly is instructed to ask the new black intern to "tone it down" simply because they share ethnicity. Also Issa's colleagues rely on her to give them the ghetto low-down whereas the black children she works with read her as white. These moments may be socially poignant, but they aren't always funny. They sometimes have the instructive tone of a 'white privilege' BuzzFeed video. Most comedy-crushing





of all, the levels of awkwardness have been dialled way down. Awkward White Jay has been replaced by two gorgeous, *nice* black men. Easy on the eye they may be, but nice does not make funny.

Clearly, Rae's intention has shifted with this show and that's OK: artists are allowed to do that. But if her intention was to create a show that depicted black life as boring, she has, unfortunately, achieved it. Watching *Insecure* after *Misadventures* is like playing a game of Spot the Difference. Some of the same actors appear in both shows and in similar roles, but they now sport less colour. In both shows Catherine Curtin plays her boss, but in *Insecure* the cornrows have been unpicked. In *Misadventures* Sujata Day plays kooky 'bff' CeCe, J's true soulmate; in *Insecure* she features as a silent background colleague. *Insecure* bff's have been upgraded to a group of sophisticated sisters with 'good hair'.

It makes sense that Rae would not want to peddle certain well-worn, problematic black tropes. The danger of desiring to appear normal through the lens of TV, however, is that you might exchange one trope for a – perhaps – less interesting one.

Twenty years ago, *Sex and the City* made the spectacle of women sitting around in chi-chi bars talking sex and men popular. The show forced a revolution in the way women represented themselves. Here was an unfiltered look into what women really thought about their own sexualities in their own words. But it's a format that's been replicated many times since and is limited in its scope. For the most part, female characters are still realised only in terms of their relationship with the opposite sex. *Insecure* climbs into the *Sex and the City* hot tub – but now the genre is tepid. Yes, Molly and Issa meet over


*It makes sense that Rae would not want to peddle problematic black tropes, but the danger of desiring to appear normal through the lens of TV is that you might exchange one trope for a less interesting one*

brunch to talk sex and men, and, yes, these characters are now black, but the narrative feels done to death. I miss the zaniness of *Misadventures*. It's like J moved to Stepford and was replaced by a TV stereotype.

The boredom of the everyday has great comedy potential, as *Atlanta* demonstrates. Donald Glover's series debuted on Fox in September, around the same time as *Insecure*. Set in the eponymous city, it follows Earn, a young father and college drop-out, as he tries to jump on the coat-tails of his cousin's burgeoning rap career. That's the hook. However, *Atlanta* is really an opportunity to share the surreal existence of young black men trapped on the fringes of America. The hilarious and disturbing second episode, 'Streets on Lock', takes place entirely in a police station where first-time felon Earn is enduring a tedious overnight wait, straining to keep eyes front as a hoodlum on his left unwittingly chats up a transvestite on his right. Glover observes eccentricities as well as Rae did in *Misadventures*.

*Atlanta* is full of the problematic tropes that Rae consciously wants to move away from – drugs and guns and a fair few magical negroes. But unlike Rae, Glover amps up the strange and unusual: "I just always wanted to make *Twin Peaks* with rappers," he said in one interview. *Atlanta* is many things, but it is never boring or derivative. Interestingly, in *Misadventures* J desperately hopes that her first date with White Jay will turn out to be a Glover gig. (It's not.) J would love Glover. Glover came to TV prominence as the goof Troy Barnes in the sitcom *Community*, a multiculti portrayal of the lovable losers who end up at community college. By this point in his career, Glover was already a seasoned stand-up, as well as a rapper under the name Childish Gambino, and had sharpened his sitcom skills in the writing room of NBC's Tina Fey vehicle *30 Rock*. With *Atlanta*, Glover was intent on keeping his own show intimate, bringing friends and family on to his team and writing from his own home-based workspace. The result is a mescaline trip of a show, which has been described as a post-sitcom sitcom. *Atlanta* is now Fox's highest-rated comedy.

Both Rae and Glover grew up between white and black worlds and their liminality granted them original perspectives. In their new shows, though, Rae has seemed to drift to a more centrist view, while Glover has continued to travel way past leftfield. As a result, he has created something much more memorable.

*Misadventures* and *Insecure* are very different shows, and perhaps comparison is unfair: but the difference shows the perils of mimicking someone else's version of normality – and serves as a reminder of the, possibly self-imposed, pressures on the black writer. The desire to fit into a 'normal' TV frame is a limiting one especially for black female writers. First, that frame was not originally designed with them in mind and second, that frame constricts the comedic scope. Rae remains an extremely talented comic performer and writer. Her presence draws me back each week, in the hope of glimpsing some awkward flashes of brilliance. I hope she eventually sidesteps the stifling romance of TV, lets her hair grow free, and continues to mine the deep seam of our innate rubbishness. The image of J shimmying clumsily along a corridor will stay in my mind for a long time yet. 



*Insecure* is on Sky Atlantic and HBO Online.  
*Atlanta* is on Fox UK and Amazon Video

#### COUCH TRIPS

Issa Rae as Issa with Jay Ellis as boyfriend Lawrence in *Insecure* (above), and Brian Tyree Henry, Keith Stanfield and Donald Glover in Donald Glover's Fox series *Atlanta* (right)





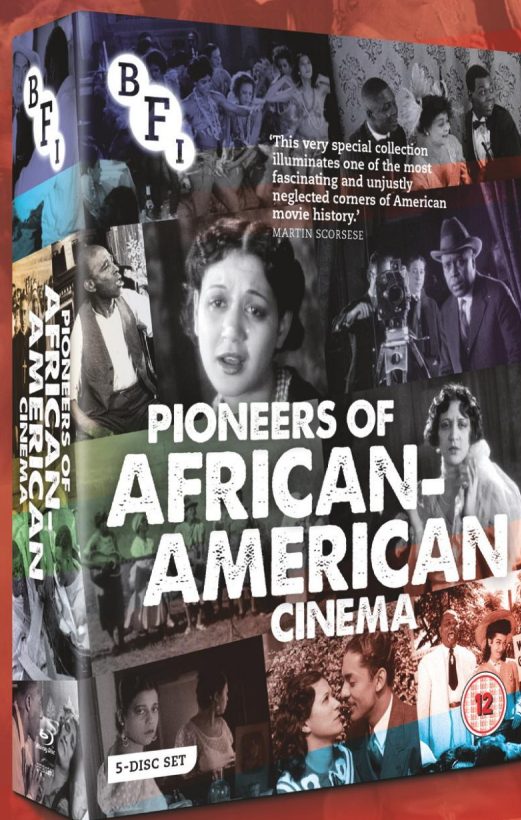


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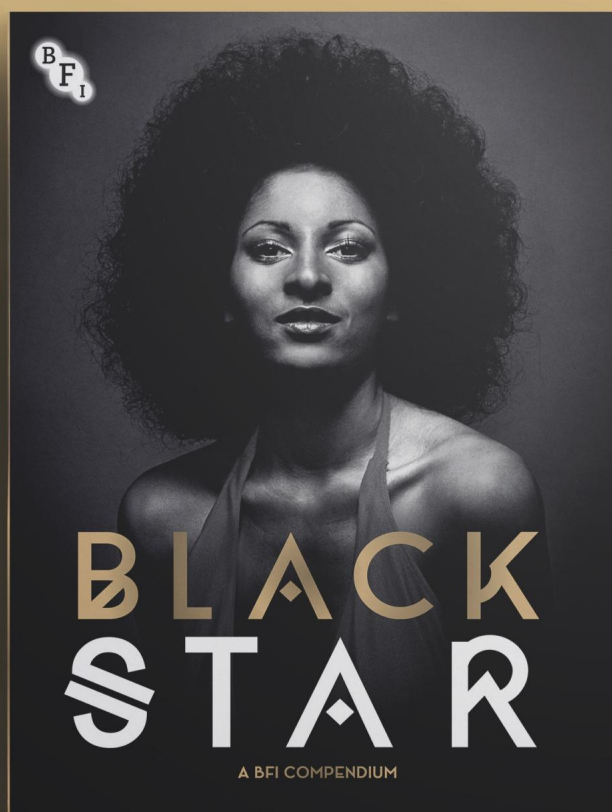
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# MORAL TALES

The late, great Polish director Krzysztof Kieslowski rose to international prominence on the back of 'Dekalog', his epic cycle of television dramas loosely themed around the Ten Commandments, but for far too long his earlier, brilliant TV work has been unjustly neglected

By Michael Brooke

Throughout the moving image's first century, it was hard to deny that television had a raw deal compared with its notionally more 'serious' big brother. Its ephemerality didn't help: before the VCR era a programme was doing well if it was screened twice (complaints about 'repeats' notwithstanding), and Ken Russell cited this lack of access as a reason why he moved into cinema features despite preferring television's greater opportunities for on-set spontaneity. And would Alan Clarke have had to wait 26 years after his untimely death for a proper box-set survey if he'd mostly made cinema films?

Clarke and his near-contemporary Krzysztof Kieslowski aren't often compared, but they have striking similarities: while both are widely regarded as social realists, on closer inspection their work is far more stylised and mysterious; both worked extensively in television; and in a spooky coincidence that might have fuelled one of Kieslowski's projects, both men died prematurely at the age of 54. However, while Clarke's work remained under the critical radar for much of his life, Kieslowski was catapulted to the forefront of international attention when his great television cycle *Dekalog* (1988) was considered so creatively outstanding that the entire ten-part series was given a cinema release in many countries, including Britain, where it has also been readily available on various video formats for much of its life.

But this treatment remains exceptional, and the categorising of *Dekalog* as a big-screen project *manqué* has caused Kieslowski's earlier television work to be unjustly neglected. We're now in the happy position that almost every scrap of his output – bar some very early commissioned documentaries – has been commercially released in English-friendly form. But TV movies such as *Personnel* (1975) and *The Calm* (1976) were among the last to be subtitled for non-Polish appreciation – surprising, given that Kieslowski himself thought both superior to *The Scar* (1976), the cinema feature debut they bookended.

Kieslowski's TV output began with the documentary *The Photograph* (1968), his first professional production, in which the director is the onscreen investigator of the story behind a photograph of two boys, taken in the mid-1940s at the time of the liberation of Warsaw. He tracks them down and shows it to them but, in a real-life twist that anticipates the historical complexities of *Dekalog*

*Eight*, in the process we learn more about the tragic context in which the picture was taken. In a 1973 interview Kieslowski cited this as his favourite of his early films, but even then it was believed lost and it only resurfaced a few years ago. He also shot four projects on videotape for the long-running Polish Television Theatre strand, adaptations of work by Zofia Posmysz (*The Hunting Permit*, 1972), Stefan Zweig (*Checking the King*, 1972), the American playwright William Gibson (*Two for the Seesaw*, 1976) and Tadeusz Rozewicz (*The Card Index*, 1979).

Kieslowski's first fiction piece for television from an idea that he originated himself was *Pedestrian Subway* (1973), a half-hour short about what may well be the last meeting between an estranged couple, as it rapidly becomes clear that they have irreconcilably different future plans. It's largely a two-hander, performed by future Wajda regular Andrzej Seweryn and the prolific television actress Teresa Krzyzanowska, shot by Sławomir Idziak mostly in one take, hand-held, thanks to Kieslowski's decision to scrap the first nine (out of ten) days' more conventionally staged filming and start from scratch. The director still wasn't happy with the end result, but it's compellingly performed and forms a historically important bridge between his documentary work and the similarly intimate fictional encounters of *Dekalog* (in particular the old flames of *Dekalog Three*). The title echoes the likes of the earlier *Factory* (1970) and looks forward to *Hospital* (1976) and *Railway Station* (1980), as does the caught-on-the-wing background footage of anonymous subway pedestrians.

*First Love* (1974) is an anomalous entry in Kieslowski's filmography, because it's his only drama-documentary and also his only attempt to put into practice the ideas outlined in his master's thesis. 'The Dramaturgy of the Real' called for "a psychological film about a person, [constructing] strictly fiction-feature action, using a strictly documentary method. It will compete with a Western, a melodrama, crime film, psychological and social drama. It will not replace Welles or Fellini in film art, but it will replace many contemporary realists. Because reality, and we find that often, is in fact melodramatic and dramatic, tragic and comical." Kieslowski found his subject in Jadwiga Kail, a pregnant teenager, and traced her life from an interview with her gynaecologist (in both

**LIFE AND NOTHING BUT**  
Nearly every scrap of Kieslowski's TV output is now available to watch in English-friendly form, including (clockwise from top left) *Dekalog One* (1988), *First Love* (1974), *Personnel* (1975), *The Calm* (1976), *Short Working Day* (1981) and *Pedestrian Subway* (1974)







◀ this film and *Dekalog Two*, abortion is presented as an option: after 1993, that would no longer be the case) until shortly after the birth of her baby, examining the effect of this lifestyle change on her and her boyfriend Roman Moskal. Kieslowski initially carried on filming the Moskals, presumably with the aim of creating Poland's answer to Michael Apted's *Seven Up!* (1964), but decided that it was too much of an intrusion on their daughter, who'd be unable to give informed consent.

*Personnel* was Kieslowski's longest film to date, and in effect his first fiction feature. There's still a nod towards the 'dramaturgy of the real', in that the supporting cast is played by actual technicians at the Wrocław Opera House and the subject was drawn from Kieslowski's own pre-film school career at Warsaw's Współczesny Theatre. It's also one of the earliest examples of the so-called cinema of moral anxiety, which would become one of the dominant modes of Polish cinema at the turn of the 1980s, with Kieslowski's *Camera Buff* (1979) and *Blind Chance* (1981) among its most distinguished titles. Here, the moral anxiety felt by the 20-year-old protagonist Romek (future director Juliusz Machulski) is caused by him being trapped in a situation where, partly thanks to his own naïveté and inexperience, he's forced to choose between loyalty to an unfairly slighted colleague and the blandishments of his superiors (the unspoken bribe being the continuation of his career), a situation presented matter-of-factly enough to ensure that the film escaped the politicised scrutiny that would see the four-year shelving of *The Calm*.

*The Calm* was eventually screened in 1980, when the workers' strike that forms the backbone of the narrative seemed far less politically inflammatory (or rather, since the Gdansk shipyard strike and the birth of the Solidarity trade union movement had become front-page news around the world, there was nothing for it to inflame any more). It was conceived as a vehicle for the outstanding character actor Jerzy Stuhr, who would later turn up in *Camera Buff*, *Dekalog Ten* and *Three Colours: White* (1994). Stuhr's technical skill and ability to imbue even the most flawed individual with considerable sympathy made the hapless Antoni Gralak one of the most rounded of all Kieslowski protagonists. Released from a three-year sentence for a never-specified offence, Gralak relocates to an unfamiliar town to try to start his life afresh, repeatedly affirming that all he's after are the bare minimum of life's necessities: food, a roof, a loving partner, peace and quiet.

*The stories in 'Dekalog' run the gamut of human existence: pregnancy, childhood, marriage, parenthood, old age, death, sex, secrets and greed*

**TAXI TO THE DARK SIDE**  
*Dekalog Five*, documenting the brutal murder of a taxi driver and the killer's subsequent execution, was released in a longer theatrical version as *A Short Film About Killing* (1988)



This being a Kieslowski film, the latter proves tragically elusive even in a notionally socialist society. More than a decade before *Dekalog* and *The Double Life of Véronique* (1991), it's also the first Kieslowski film to nudge the metaphysical, with its never-explained images of galloping horses that first turn up on a faulty television screen and later in apparent reality.

Kieslowski disowned his final pre-*Dekalog* television film, *Short Working Day*, in no uncertain terms. It was banned on completion in 1981 when martial law was declared, but Kieslowski himself continued to enforce the ban for the rest of his life – its world premiere was held a few months after his death. The ostensible reason for his dislike was that he felt it had been a serious mistake to attempt a sympathetic portrait of a mid-ranking communist official at this particular period of Polish history, but the rarity of such a portrait in the context of Polish film and TV as a whole gives it considerable historical fascination today. It's also the only Kieslowski film that's set in a specific historical era: summer 1976, when huge government-enforced price rises led to widespread social and industrial unrest.

When Kieslowski made *Short Working Day*, he was merely one of the more promising new Polish film talents, broadly on the same level as Ryszard Bugajski or Wojciech Marczewski. By the time it was finally screened, he was a great European master, an international status bestowed on him by the success of *Dekalog* and the spin-off *Short Films*. *Dekalog* eschewed the political subject-matter that had underpinned the four cinema features the director had made so far (the fourth being 1984's *No End*), and referred only obliquely to conditions in contemporary Poland – decisions that undoubtedly boosted its international appeal. Kieslowski and co-writer Krzysztof Piesiewicz used the Ten Commandments as a high-concept hook on which to hang ten more or less self-contained dramas (a large Warsaw housing estate is common to all, and protagonists of one episode occasionally have cameos in another).

These stories run the gamut of human existence: pregnancy (*Two*), childhood (*One, Seven*), marriage (*Two, Three, Nine*), parenthood (*One, Four, Seven*), reflective old age (*Eight*), death (*Five, Ten*), sex (*Six, Nine*), withheld secrets (*Two, Four, Seven, Eight*), greed (*Ten*). *Dekalog One*, a ruthlessly focused parable of disastrously misplaced confidence, gets the cycle off to the strongest possible start, with the black comedy *Dekalog Ten* offering an invigorating change of tone at the end. The unexplained horses in *The Calm* take on human form, with a mysterious mute bystander (played by Artur Barcis) turning up in most episodes to witness the crucial moment of a possibly irrevocable moral decision. Watching it afresh, the scope of Kieslowski and Piesiewicz's ambition remains breathtaking, their ideas as universal and provocative as ever, with even the apparently most 'dated' episode, *Dekalog One*, seeming to anticipate our addiction to online media, something Kieslowski did not live to see. What would he have thought of 21st-century Poland? Most likely much the same: a geographical repository of countless specimens of flawed but fascinating humanity. The mere fact that *Dekalog* doesn't remotely feel three decades old is testament to that. 📺



**Dekalog and Other Television Works is out now on Blu-ray and DVD from Arrow**



# STARDUST MEMORIES

*There was certainly a Victor Meldrew side to Krzysztof Kieslowski, and there is no doubting his moral seriousness, but he was also a humorous man with a sharp sense of comic absurdity*

**By Tony Rayns**

By a stroke of luck, the first time I encountered Krzysztof Kieslowski was in a bar in Tokyo. This meant that we had a small social relationship before we next met as filmmaker and critic at a festival somewhere. The bar was 'La Jetée' in Shinjuku's Golden-gai, a tiny upstairs room hidden away in a labyrinth of similarly tiny bars, owned and operated by Kawai Tomoyo as a tribute to her favourite director, Chris Marker. It's still there now, open from Tuesday to Saturday, but now bans smoking – which would have been a major deterrent for Kieslowski. Back then (I think it was in 1989), aside from its clientele of Japanese regulars, the place was an almost obligatory stop for any foreign filmmaker visiting Tokyo; its shelves are still packed with old whisky bottles hand-painted by Marker, along with bottles signed by everyone from Coppola to Wenders. The Tokyo Metropolitan government is constantly threatening to demolish Golden-gai; I hope some gallery or museum rescues all those bottles if it does.

As I recall, the conversation that night turned on the unpleasant, chemical taste of Nikka whisky and the joys of tobacco, not on Kieslowski's 'cinema of moral anxiety'. I'd seen at least a couple of his 1980s films – certainly *Blind Chance* and *No End* – and most recently the extraordinary *A Short Film About Killing*, but not yet the *Dekalog* series or *A Short Film About Love*. I did ask him about the relationship between the feature version of *Killing* and the shorter TV original, and I remember him telling me that it was the chance to make the feature that persuaded him to undertake the TV series in the first place. It was *Killing*, of course, that had brought him to Tokyo. The film sky-rocketed his international reputation, in perfect sync with the sudden opening up of the former Soviet bloc in Eastern Europe.

There was a Victor Meldrew side to Kieslowski – a grumpy exterior, no less dissatisfied with the state of post-communist Poland than he had been with life under the forgotten general who crushed the Solidarity strike – but he always struck me as a fundamentally humorous man. Underlying the high moral seriousness of *No End* and the *Dekalog* films, with their




**Camera buff: Krzysztof Kieslowski**

characters stricken by grief at the loss of loved ones and rage at the bureaucratic incompetence of the system, was a wry sense of comic absurdity. This sensibility surfaced most visibly in the two films with rock-star Zbigniew Zamachowski, *Dekalog Ten* and *Three Colours: White*, both of which see the funny side of frustration, impotence and go-getting materialism. *Dekalog Ten* actually opens with Zamachowski on stage, belting out a punk thrash which enjoins his audience to break the Ten Commandments (lyrics: K. Kieslowski), which may not demolish the entire conceptual framework of the series but certainly brings its relevance to the 'devout' Poland of the 1980s into question.

Catholic piety was the least of Kieslowski's concerns when he and his co-conspirator Krzysztof Piesiewicz (a human-rights lawyer) embarked on their *Dekalog* project. Their aim was to take stock of contemporary Polish life, but without either the political activism which had dominated Andrzej Wajda's *Man of Marble*/*Man of Iron* diptych or the miserabilist bread-line clichés found in films by, for example, Agnieszka Holland. Kieslowski had met Piesiewicz soon after martial law was declared in 1981. Kieslowski, then still primarily a director of documentaries, had the idea of shooting a film about the workings

*Our conversation turned on the taste of Nikka whisky and the joys of tobacco, not on the 'cinema of moral anxiety'*

of the courts (it sounds like a Frederick Wiseman project, but would assuredly have turned out very differently if he'd seen it through) and found, to his surprise, that judges were invariably more lenient on accused dissidents when the cameras were rolling. Piesiewicz was the first defence lawyer to catch on to what was happening, and they formed a friendship. It was Piesiewicz, several years later, who suggested a film "about the Ten Commandments". Kieslowski rejected the idea, and then succumbed.

It's good that *Dekalog* is available on disc, partly because it's a great binge-watch, partly because seeing the episodes one after another makes the series' internal connections and intersections more apparent. This isn't just a matter of characters from one episode making cameo appearances in others, though it's oddly heartening whenever that happens, but of building a composite picture of working-class and middle-class lives on which the forces of the state and the church have little or no impact. The focus throughout is on characters wrestling with their human relationships, whether it's a father devastated by the loss of his young son, a woman upended by the thought that the man she's always thought of as her father may not be her biological parent, or a Jewish-American woman who needs to know why her Polish-Catholic protector apparently abandoned her to the Nazis during the war. A lot of human life is here. 

 **Tony Rayns contributes a lengthy video introduction to *Dekalog* on Arrow's new Blu-ray edition**



# FATHER OF INVENTION

Rich in biblical references and religious iconography, Eugène Green's *'The Son of Joseph'* borrows the imagery of the past to examine the spiritual health of the present, in a satirical, often very funny tale that follows a young man's search for the father who abandoned him

By Catherine Wheatley

**True to the promise of its title**, *The Son of Joseph* is a film ripe with religious symbolism. Its Nativity-like premise sees a young man, Vincent (Victor Ezenfis), the fatherless son of demure nurse Marie (Natacha Régnier), who goes looking for his birth father and finds instead a surrogate named Joseph (Fabrizio Rongione). The story is structured by chapter titles such as 'The Sacrifice of Abraham', 'The Golden Calf', 'The Carpenter' and 'The Flight into Egypt', and the *mise en scène* is littered with religious works of art: not least of which is the huge reproduction of Caravaggio's *The Sacrifice of Isaac* on Vincent's bedroom wall. Towards the film's end we find Marie, clad in cerulean blue, riding a donkey along a dusty Normandy trail. And at the film's midpoint the narrative pauses for an extended theological discussion, during which Joseph tells Vincent, "God is in us. He tells us to love."

Despite this proliferation of Judeo-Christian imagery, director Eugène Green insists *The Son of Joseph* is not about religion, but like all his films, novels and plays, is interested in spirituality and its place in contemporary Europe. Religion, he believes, gives us images and metaphors for approaching spirituality: "I call on the Judeo-Christian tradition because it's the European tradition," Green tells me.

Green left his native North America for France some 50 years ago, and has spent the period since directing plays, writing novels and making beautiful idiosyncratic films which defy categorisation. He is scathing about the country of his birth, which he refers to as "*La Barbarie*", but despite his fondness for his adopted homeland, he feels its inhabitants have lost touch with many of the traditions that have shaped Western civilisation, be they religious, cultural, intellectual or moral. As a corrective of sorts to this historical disconnect, his films are steeped in esoteric references to this past that span architecture, music, literature and the visual arts. For this reason they are often seen as somewhat scholarly, even old-fashioned, yet Green insists *The Son of Joseph* is very much concerned with the present.

"The film started with an idea about a very contemporary situation: that of a child who'd been raised by his mother, alone, who had no father, because the father didn't even want him to be born," he says of the film's origins. "I could have made the film without any biblical references – it would have been easier to get funding in France in that case! But I think the past helps us to live in the present. Today people don't experience the present in part because they're always on their phones. They don't see other people, they just see these tiny screens."

Such is the world that Vincent inhabits in the opening scenes of *The Son of Joseph*. We first meet him walking



*My DP described it as my first action film, because you have a chase scene at the end, with the cops in hot pursuit. Of course it's totally surreal, because you've got a donkey in there*

away from two friends who are torturing a caged rat, and he immediately bumps into a friend who pitches him a stake in an online business selling sperm ("It happens. Like Amazon or something!" Green says). "We see people who mock him, who bash into him too," Green adds. "I wanted to show this violent world he's alienated from because of the absence of his father, but that he himself is not bad or violent. He doesn't want to be part of it."

A son without a father, a society without a past. In a sense, isn't it all a question of inheritance? "It's a theme that's in a lot of my films – that spiritual and cultural heritage is as important as biological heritage. What you have in the film is a child who doesn't have a father, who discovers his father, who doesn't want that father, and so who finds a father elsewhere."

The father Vincent does find, Oscar Pormenor, is a villain of almost pantomime-like proportions, played with reptilian coolness by Mathieu Amalric, who starred in Green's 2006 short *Les Signes*. (Green works with a sort of repertory company: Rongione and Régnier have both played leads in earlier works, and there are bit parts for regulars Christelle Prot and Adrien Michaux.) The head of a publishing house, Pormenor is a faithless husband who abandoned Marie when she refused to abort her child, and a ruthless businessman with seemingly little interest in the books he produces. "I believe in the power of art," Green says. "But there are plenty of people who use art simply as terrain in which to exert their power. Pormenor could just as well be a politician or factory foreman. For him, culture is just a way to take power and make money. That attitude becomes an object of satire for me."

Satirise that attitude he does. Pormenor is a variant on the odious conductor played by Denis Podalydès in Green's *Le Pont des Arts* (2004), in which the director ferociously lampooned the elitist baroque music scene. In





**CREATIVE INSTINCT**  
Victor Ezenfis plays Vincent (above left), with Mathieu Amalric as his estranged father Oscar Pormenor (above, flanked from left by Marie-Anne Mestre, Julia Gros de Gasquet and Maria de Medeiros), and Natacha Régnier as his mother Marie and Fabrizio Rongione as his surrogate father Joseph (below), in *The Son of Joseph* by Eugène Green (left)

*The Son of Joseph*, Vincent's pursuit of Oscar through the Parisian literary scene occasions a similar skewering of pretensions. Particularly funny is the wine-soaked critic Violette Tréfouille (Maria de Medeiros), who, failing to recognise Vincent, decides he is an author and declares him "the new Céline". There is also one monumentally awkward scene of coitus interruptus that takes place on a *chaise longue*, beneath which Vincent is hiding. It's the first sex scene in Green's *oeuvre*: how was it for him? "Well," he says, laughing, "you don't actually see anything. In fact Mathieu and [co-star] Julia Gros de Gasquet recorded the sound, and then we positioned the *chaise longue* vertically to get the bouncing effect."

Despite the humour in such moments, Green is not entirely comfortable with *The Son of Joseph* being labelled a comedy. "I'm always quite shocked by this description," he says. "I like to use humour to lighten serious scenes, to provide relief, make it more bearable. [But] people think that as soon as there is a scene where you laugh a lot, it's

a comedy. Whereas I see it as a very serious film, but with some comic elements." Take, for example, that sex scene. "Yes, it's funny. But it's also horrible for poor Vincent, who's under the sofa. We see the horror on his face."

Still, he concedes that the film is his liveliest to date. The protagonists of his earlier works all undertake a quest of sorts – from a mission to kill an evil troll (*Le Monde vivant*, 2003), through the search for the owner of a beautiful voice (*Le Pont des Arts*) and a location shoot in Lisbon (*The Portuguese Nun*, 2009) to a *Voyage to Italy*-style trip to save a marriage (*La sapienza*, 2014) – but in *The Son of Joseph*, Vincent, Marie and Joseph find themselves on the run from the police. "My DP Raphaël O'Byrne described it as my first action film, because you have a chase scene at the end, with the cops in hot pursuit. Of course it's totally surreal, because you've got a donkey in there."

At the public screening of the film the night before we met, Green gleefully announced that despite a donkey appearing in each of his films, this was the first time he'd worked with one that was regularly hired out for shoots – a "professional donkey", as he called it. *The Son of Joseph* didn't have an especially big budget, but it was produced by the Dardenne brothers, whose involvement opened certain doors. They brought in a team of Belgian specialists, including production designer Paul Rouschop, whom Green credits with allowing him to push some of his favoured visual tropes – including the use of a vibrant colour scheme – further than he'd previously been able to.

And what of the Dardennes themselves: does Green enjoy their work? "They like my films, and it's reciprocal," he says. "All the filmmakers I like have a very personal style. Theirs is a very different style from mine, but they're looking for the same thing. They too are interested in interiority, and in the spiritual. And their cinema has a lot of Christian references. It's rather more hidden than in my films, but it's there."

Green also sees affinities between his work and that of Robert Bresson – to whom he is frequently compared, largely because of the deadpan performance style he likes to elicit from his actors. Yet there's a warmth, even a sentimentality, to his work that's lacking in Bresson's, and it's no surprise that he also cites Ozu as a filmmaker he greatly admires. Perhaps less obviously, he mentions Fellini and Antonioni. Indeed Marie and Joseph go on a date to see the latter director's *Red Desert* (1964), and Green had originally hoped to include its closing scene in *The Son of Joseph*. "It's film I like a lot, and it has a very personal significance for me. I saw it for the first time when I was 16 and it was while I was watching it that I realised I wanted to be a filmmaker."

I wonder how far this admiration extends. Despite the rather cynical eye with which Green views contemporary society, his work seems to refrain from political comment, and he is bemused by one Spanish critic's suggestion that *The Son of Joseph* harbours an anti-abortion message. All the same, he insists that his films are political, albeit not in a manner that is immediately obvious. "Politics is society, civilisation, and my films have a relationship to that. It's not a direct one. I don't want to make films like those so-called politically engaged works made in the 1970s: they're bad films, and no one watches them anymore. I don't like films that moralise either." But, he adds, "I do think films can change people. And if enough artists go in the same direction, they can perhaps transform society by changing society's members." 📺

**i** *The Son of Joseph* is released in selected UK cinemas on 16 December and on Mubi from Christmas Day, and is reviewed on page 91







*A fascination with the innovative experiments of early cinema fuels the work of South African artist William Kentridge, whose multimedia installations employ a distinctive stop-motion process to create vivid animations exploring time, history, politics, black holes – and megaphones*

**By Richard Combs**

# TIME AFTER TIME

**'Thick Time' is the title of a show** featuring six installations by the South African artist William Kentridge, running at London's Whitechapel Gallery until 15 January. This is his first major solo show in the capital for more than 15 years, but one might fancy that time here has suddenly quickened for Kentridge, since another show, 'Paper Music', featuring films based on his charcoal and ink drawings, with live musical performances, recently played at The Print Room in Notting Hill, and his production of the Alban Berg modernist opera *Lulu* was unveiled on 9 November at the English National Opera.

This fairly typifies Kentridge's range of work across diverse media, work in which, as the Whitechapel catalogue for 'Thick Time' characterises it, he "roams through history drawn by the great ideological and aesthetic experiments of the 20th century or the seismic histories of colonial and post-apartheid South Africa".

Kentridge's parents were liberal lawyers (his father acted for Nelson Mandela during the treason trial in the late 1950s). At the time of the 1976 Soweto uprising, Kentridge was involved in agitprop poster art and political theatre. His early career involved work as an art director in both television and film; he studied with the Jacques Lecoq theatre and mime school in Paris and is a longstanding collaborator with the Handspring Puppet Company in Johannesburg.

But he insists that all his work is based on drawing, which he refers to as a way of thinking aloud. His large charcoal compositions, often sketched over pre-existing text from dictionaries or reference books, are his most immediately recognisable work and his most

IMAGES COURTESY WILLIAM KENTRIDGE, MARIAN GOODMAN GALLERY AND HAKOMA GALLERY



ambitious, in both physical and historical reach. In April this year, he created an epic frieze of Roman history, *Triumphs and Laments* – finding space not only for Romulus and Remus but also for Pier Paolo Pasolini and Anita Ekberg – along the banks of the River Tiber in Rome. In his ENO production of *Lulu*, fragmented ink drawings of Lulu were projected on stage as a way of showing that there were, in Kentridge's words, "different images of Lulu, different women for different men, different possibilities". Beyond that, the projections sometimes represented people's thoughts; they became a chorus commenting on the action.

In employing drawing for dramatic purposes, Kentridge has also written himself into film history – making his own distinctive contribution as an animator while also recreating the excitement of the early inventive uses of moving imagery, or even the fun of exploring what can be done with basic equipment. Kentridge animates not by filming a succession of different drawings, each allowing for tiny alterations in the action depicted, but by rubbing out and making changes on the original drawing and filming each stage: a process of accumulation by erasure.

This process took a new direction with the *Triumphs and Laments* project, which saw a 500-metre stretch of wall along the Tiber covered with stencils of the historical tableaux, before the wall was cleaned around the stencils to allow the images to stand out on the night of a musical procession and performance. In a documentary about this project, Giovanni Troilo's *William Kentridge: Triumphs and Laments*, Kentridge muses over the different workings of historical time: it took 15 years for this project to come together, some 2,500 years are covered in the imagery, and over the next five years it will fade away, as the images are lost to dirt and natural erosion.

What Kentridge's animation creates is a kind of palimpsest. For Kentridge, making use of what is there is part of the process; each working day doesn't begin with a clean slate. In the 'Thick Time' exhibition, perhaps the most extensive remaking occurs around film history itself. *Journey to the Moon* (2003) is his own version of Georges Méliès's fantasy from 1902, one in which a Moka coffee pot is the vehicle that will eventually give the moon one in the eye. This is the original 1933 Express model of the Moka, which is second only to the megaphone as Kentridge's major motif. It is wielded by a mythological figure in *Triumphs and Laments* in place of a more traditional weapon ("This image is telling Rome to wake up," an onlooker comments in the documentary).

There is also a collection entitled *7 Fragments for Georges Méliès* (2003), in which the space is the studio, and Kentridge himself is seen at work – or in a state of brooding uncertainty, as if waiting for inspiration. The tools and materials of his trade circulate around him in ceaseless flux, thanks to the time-honoured tricks of stop- and reverse-motion (the ink or charcoal line that disappears back into the pot or the brush). Kentridge walks into shot with a stepladder, disappears after climbing it, then tumbles back into frame when the ladder crumbles after turning into an animated version of itself.

"If the seven earlier fragments are about wandering around the studio waiting for something to happen, *Journey to the Moon* was an attempt to escape," Kentridge says in the catalogue for 'Thick Time'. *Second-hand Reading* (2013) is another animated series, with the drawings filmed as a flip-book – again with a distracted Kentridge walking through, and with pages from the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* used as the base layer for the drawings



**MEGAPHONE DIPLOMACY**  
*The Refusal of Time* (2012, opposite) evokes the kind of puppet theatre that was one of the progenitors of early cinema, while *O Sentimental Machine* (2015, top, above) features newsreel footage and explores Trotsky's time in Istanbul between 1929-33

("Let us enter the chapter"; "Whichever page you open, there you are," say some accompanying titles).

It's a distinguishing feature of Kentridge's work in many media that forms always seem to be in transit, and so it's not surprising that the political and conceptual aspects of his art should also be constantly evolving – merging and then drifting apart. The megaphone, for instance, plays a central role in an installation at the 'Thick Time' exhibition, *O Sentimental Machine* (2015), based on Trotsky's time in exile in Istanbul from 1929-33. Here the actors in a political drama – or a drama that is trying to happen, as Trotsky exhorts and declaims and his secretary frantically types – are frequently reassembled with mechanical parts.

There are no drawings in *O Sentimental Machine*, which instead features newsreel footage, Kentridge playing Trotsky at one point, and a flurry of shots of Richard Burton being ice-picked in Joseph Losey's *The Assassination of Trotsky* (1972). Much of Kentridge's imagery derives from modernist concepts about the intersection of the human and the machine, and utopian aspirations for human perfectibility; a modernist in his art, Kentridge is sceptical about modernist political and social solutions. "This idea of the perfectible human struck me as an inversion of our current debate – namely, how human can machines become?" he said recently in *Art Quarterly*. "Pavlov said humans are machines with predictable reflexes, yet now people tell us you can put intuitive thought into computers. It's the death of another utopian vision."

The megaphone motif has two roles to play in





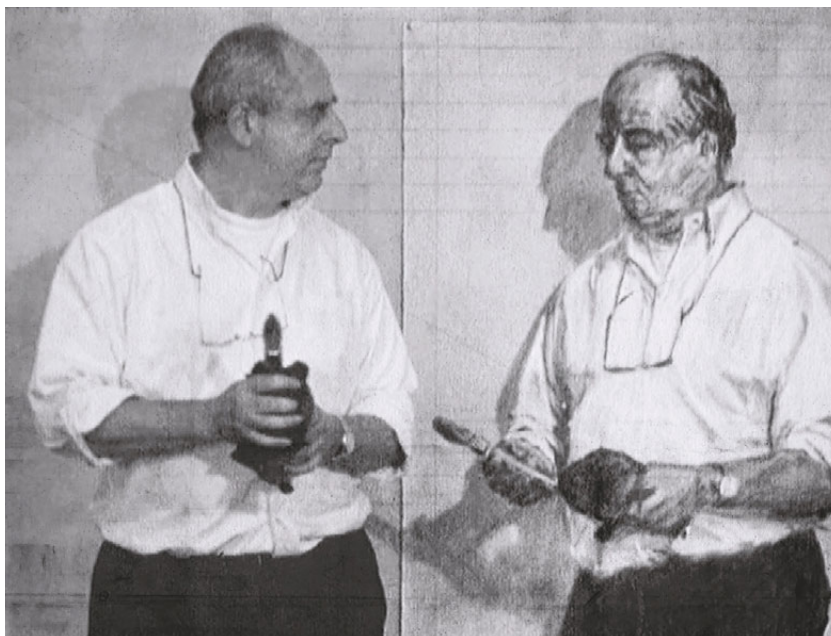
his work. It can be an aesthetic device, as he recently explained to the *Guardian*: “Cézanne spoke about the world being constructed from cones, spheres and cylinders. Which is a way of taking the world and formalising it. I like the idea of Cézanne’s cone but I wanted to send it back into the world to earn its keep which it does in the form of a megaphone... they also bring so many associations, from mass rallies to delivering instructions to 1984.” But he also employs the object as a political symbol, as can be seen in a British Museum exhibition of South African art, in which the one Kentridge exhibit – his 1989 drawing *Negotiations Minuet* – takes off from Goya and shows a figure angrily denouncing the end of apartheid, his face completely hidden behind a megaphone.

If forms and figures in transit (in the *Triumphs and Laments* documentary, he cites a Renaissance figure of murdered Remus who resembles a photograph of the murdered Pasolini) is a defining feature of Kentridge’s work, it also defines the material base of that work. There are several examples in ‘Thick Time’ of his extensive use of tapestry, including a large poster for his 2010 production of Shostakovich’s opera *The Nose*, based on the Gogol story. For Kentridge, tapestries have a contemporary quality – “like a primitive digital form” – with 3,000 threads making up the image like pixels. His *Cinema Drawing* series (2002), showing a naked woman stepping into a bath, treats the classic subject of the bathing nude as a succession of film frames.

“Here I am,” says a voice during an only intermittently audible lecture issuing from four megaphones hung from the ceiling, in a space that also defies immediate identification. The voice is Kentridge’s, part of the collage of music and sound effects that accompanies the five-channel video installation *The Refusal of Time* (2012) at the Whitechapel exhibition. This is the result of a collaboration between Kentridge and the historian of science Peter Galison that rehearses many of the theories (and the machineries) which have accompanied historical attempts to measure, and control, time.

Dominating the room is a large wooden structure on which two sets of panels are rhythmically pumped back and forth, surrounded by five screens on which is projected a shadow-play, a silhouette procession of antic figures who turn from being a raucous carnival into a dejected parade of the oppressed. It’s reminiscent of the kind of puppet theatre that was one of the progenitors of early cinema, and which was reborn in the silent silhouette films of Lotte Reiniger. The free-form exuberance of the installation is a declaration of artistic liberation, but at the same time multiple interpretations cluster densely around it.

The wooden structure looks like it could have come from Kafka’s short story *In the Penal Colony*, which tells the story of a condemned man executed by an elaborate machine that inscribes the details of his ‘crime’ into his flesh (is the relentless beat of time the sentence that is being stitched into our consciousness?). But Kentridge’s machine has a particular association, part of the artist’s fascination with our devices for mastering the environment and their essential futility. Its bellows-like functioning, and the rhythms and sounds of the tuba that have been built into the music by Kentridge’s regular collaborator Philip Miller, are suggestive of breathing.



*One reason why Kentridge’s animation is so suggestive of early cinema is that his own cinema is a form that is still finding itself – it resists final definition*

Kentridge has christened the machine ‘the elephant’, a reference to Charles Dickens’s *Hard Times*, in which the author describes the motion of machines in a factory as like the up and down movement of “the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness”.

What also comes into the mix is Joseph Conrad’s *The Secret Agent* (1907), about an anarchist who tries to blow up the Greenwich Observatory in London. A version of the actual attempt by a French anarchist to blow up the building – part of the contest between the two powers over who would control the mapping of the world and thus the movement of shipping – is depicted in *The Reversal of Time* (though the bomb-makers here are African rather than European). As for time being reversed – or at least recuperated – Kentridge’s commentary refers to the theory of the German scientist Felix Eberly who, in 1846, expanded on the discovery that light travels at a finite, measurable speed to postulate that all of space must be “a universal archive of images from the past... With each breath we pump out our images and transmit ourselves, and traces of ourselves, sending out our images.” Here I am, indeed.

One reason why Kentridge’s animation is so suggestive of early cinema is that his own cinema is a form that is still finding itself. In its fragmentary way, it resists final definition or completion. He has said that uncertainty, provisionality, is an essential feature of his work, that a film finds both its structure and its subject through its making, through accretion and erasure. If a film begins in such a fashion, there’s no reason why it should reach a more definite conclusion. The parade of figures in *The Reversal of Time* ends by entering what looks like a black hole. But Kentridge, who has talked cryptically about his endless circling round the studio, working and making, as a way of keeping depression at bay, also holds to a version of string theory whereby everything will not disappear finally into a black hole but remain on the surface of the hole, in multi-dimensional strings, its own post-Kentridge creation. ☺



‘Thick Time’ runs at the Whitechapel Gallery, London, until 15 January

**PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST**  
In *7 Fragments for Georges Méliès* (2003, above), Kentridge is seen at work while the tools of his trade circulate around him, using the tricks of stop- and reverse-motion animation





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# FILMS OF THE YEAR

Our annual poll confirms that a year marked by political earthquakes and the death of great artists was still a great year for film – as long as you looked outside the Hollywood mainstream. And in a small triumph for diversity, three of our top five films this year are by female directors

By Nick James

At the end of an often shocking, seemingly cursed year of disastrous politics, the key question for this magazine to ask is, has the cinema made it any easier to bear? Looking at our number one film of the year, Maren Ade's killer tragicomedy *Toni Erdmann*, I can say it has. The S&S-sponsored screenings of it at the BFI London Film Festival were high points – I have never seen an LFF audience explode with such roof-lifting, exuberant applause as they did at the second screening on a Sunday morning. Of course, the film – about a taunting father-daughter relationship set in a corporate business environment – hasn't been released in the UK yet, so most Brits will only get to see it early in 2017, which at least has a slim chance of being a better year. Whatever the case, it will cheer you up.

## TOP 20 FILMS OF 2016

- 1 **Toni Erdmann** Maren Ade
- 2 **Moonlight** Barry Jenkins
- 3 **Elle** Paul Verhoeven
- 4 **Certain Women** Kelly Reichardt
- 5 **American Honey** Andrea Arnold
- 6 **I, Daniel Blake** Ken Loach
- 7 **Manchester by the Sea** Kenneth Lonergan
- 8 **Things to Come (L'Avenir)** Mia Hansen-Løve
- 9 **Paterson** Jim Jarmusch
- 10 **The Death of Louis XIV** Albert Serra
- 11 **Personal Shopper** Olivier Assayas
- = **Sieranevada** Cristi Puiu
- 13 **Fire at Sea (Fuocoammare)** Gianfranco Rosi
- = **Nocturama** Bertrand Bonello
- = **Julieta** Pedro Almodóvar
- 16 **La La Land** Damien Chazelle
- = **Cameraperson** Kirsten Johnson
- 18 **Love & Friendship** Whit Stillman
- 19 **Aquarius** Kleber Mendonça Filho
- = **Victoria** Sebastian Schipper

The second-placed film, *Moonlight* – a beautifully crafted three-phase portrait of a gay black youth growing up in Miami gang culture – is more likely to bring on tears. It's wonderful to see what is only Barry Jenkins's second feature getting such a high rating. In the year of the 'Black Lives Matter' campaign, his reflective filmmaking marks an apposite response to the closing of the Obama era. Altogether different again is *Elle*, in third place. Director Paul Verhoeven has many admirers among critics but few would have imagined he would make such an in-depth character-driven piece, a brilliant twist on the psychological rape-revenge thriller, starring Isabelle Huppert as the heroine who refuses to become a victim.

A trio of powerful female performances also drives Kelly Reichardt's exploration of the lives of ordinary Montana women, *Certain Women*, at number four. Alongside Ade and Andrea Arnold's fifth-placed *American Honey*, this produces what is an unprecedented result for an S&S year poll: three of the top five films this year are by female directors. This result is drawn from an electorate of 104 men and 59 women – a male gender bias of slightly less than two to one. We see this outcome as a stepping stone to such a result becoming unremarkable in future and our electorate moving towards a 50-50 split.

Every year we get a few complaints that our poll isn't restricted to UK film release dates (this year we've published a separate chart overleaf that shows what that might look like). But we are an internationally distributed film magazine, with many of our voters working in other countries, so we're unapologetic about that. It means that our poll can be both a summation of what's happened internationally in film in 2016 and a useful pointer to the best films about to come out in the UK.

As it happens, the two highest-placed British films, *American Honey* and Ken Loach's *I, Daniel Blake* (sixth) have already been seen by domestic audiences. In distinctly different ways, the films offer timely portraits of the dispossessed. If Arnold's road trip with young magazine sellers didn't anticipate the direction of

Those of us who believe international cinema spreads inspirational knowledge and ideas have had to take a deep breath

ILLUSTRATION BY ALEX WILLIAMSON









the US elections, it did reveal the insecurity and desperation in so many American communities. Loach's film is more directly political, a hugely moving assault on the banal cruelties inflicted by the bureaucracy of the UK benefits system. As we learn elsewhere in this issue (see 'The Numbers', page 13), it is Loach's second-most successful film ever, which is one in the eye for some reviewers in the right-wing press, who went out of their way to damage the film's success with trivial complaints. The two films top our notional UK release chart below, although if we factored in the votes given in last year's poll to films released in 2016, *The Assassin* and *Cemetery of Splendour* would be first and second, respectively.

Given the anti-globalisation, anti-establishment voting patterns in the UK, the US and parts of Europe, there is bound to be a greater focus on class in the cinema of the next few years. In the meantime, such contrasting blue-collar portraits as Jim Jarmusch's *Paterson* and Kenneth Lonergan's *Manchester by the Sea* offer intriguing viewing. *Paterson* is about a bus driver at peace with himself because he is creatively fulfilled by writing poetry and enchanted by the woman he lives with; *Manchester* is about the impossibility of recovering from a debilitating family trauma. Neither film evinces the kind of con-

tempt for workers Clintonites were routinely accused of during the election campaign, but then neither of the leads shows the slightest inclination towards the kind of xenophobia that brought Trump to power – though Lee Chandler, the bereaved father brought so eloquently to half-life by Casey Affleck, is prone to drunken violence.

Against the background of that rise of intolerance across the West, those of us who believe international cinema spreads inspirational knowledge and ideas have had to take a deep breath and realise that the release of too many specialist titles has thinned out the market for foreign-language cinema to precarious levels. Philip Knatchbull of Curzon/Artificial Eye complained that his cinemas were half empty and that theatrical screenings were now, more obviously than ever, a loss leader for download and DVD sales.

Given the right push, *Toni Erdmann* ought to be a huge breakout hit, but in the current climate you can't be sure. It's possible that our voters are now so conscious of the need to give non-anglophone cinema a boost that mainstream films don't figure in their considerations any more. Last year, *Max Max: Fury Road* claimed third place. Three years ago *Gravity* came second. Six years ago *The Social Network* actually came top. This year, the strongest mainstream candidate, *Doctor Strange*, got just three votes. But it is widely agreed among critics that, quality-wise, 2016 has been one of Hollywood's most miserably hopeless years on record. At this point you might expect me to hope for a reactive silver lining of serious engagement from Hollywood towards the Trump presidency, but honestly, the best I can do is to say, let's wait and see.

None the less, I do expect films and film culture to be more politicised in 2017 than they have been of late. If Hollywood has had a lean year, what our poll shows is that cinema elsewhere is extremely alive, inventive and multifarious. When you look at the sample responses over the following pages and later the full panoply online, it's obvious what a good year it's been for the artform of cinema, and that's a small mercy we'll gladly take. ☺

*It is widely agreed among critics that, quality-wise, 2016 has been one of Hollywood's most miserably hopeless years on record*

#### TOP FILMS RELEASED IN THE UK IN 2016

- 1 **American Honey** *Andrea Arnold*
- 2 **I, Daniel Blake** *Ken Loach*
- 3 **Paterson** *Jim Jarmusch*
- 4 **Things to Come** *Mia Hansen-Løve*
- 5 **Fire at Sea** *Gianfranco Rosi*
- = **Julieta** *Pedro Almodóvar*
- 7 **Love & Friendship** *Whit Stillman*
- 8 **Embrace of the Serpent** *Ciro Guerra*
- 9 **Evolution** *Lucile Hadzihalilovic*
- = **Victoria** *Sebastian Schipper*
- = **Everybody Wants Some!!** *Richard Linklater*
- = **Hell or High Water** *David Mackenzie*

**PURE CLASS**  
Kenneth Lonergan's *Manchester by the Sea* (above left) and Jim Jarmusch's *Paterson* (above right) both offer sophisticated portraits of blue collar life in the US



# THE YEAR IN REVIEW

**Please note:** below are the edited versions of 50 critics' lists of their top films of 2016, out of a total of 163 responses on which the poll on page 42 is based. The remaining lists and highlights are online at [bfi.org.uk/best-films-2016](http://bfi.org.uk/best-films-2016)

## GEOFF ANDREW

Programmer-at-large,  
BFI Southbank, UK

**Sieranevada** *Cristi Puiu*

**Paterson** *Jim Jarmusch*

**A Quiet Passion** *Terence Davies*

**Fire at Sea** *Gianfranco Rosi*

**Things to Come** *Mia Hansen-Løve*

● The highlight of my year was probably the London Film Festival's Archive Gala screening of Arthur Robson's *The Informer* (1929) – a meticulous BFI restoration of one of the best British films made at the end of the silent era, with a truly superb live performance of an unusually audacious, subtle, detailed and evocative new score for sextet by virtuoso violinist and composer Garth Knox. Both cinematically and musically, it was a marvellous evening.

Sadly, however, the year's most memorable event was the shocking, perhaps wholly avoidable death of Abbas Kiarostami, for me and many others the greatest artist working in film over the last few decades.

## ERIKA BALSOM

Senior lecturer in film studies,  
King's College London, UK

**The Death of Louis XIV** *Albert Serra*

**The Illinois Parables** *Deborah Stratman*

**Toni Erdmann** *Maren Ade*

**Elle** *Paul Verhoeven*

**General Report II: The New**

**Abduction of Europe** *Pere Portabella*

● Beyond my top five features, favourite shorts include Laidà Lertxundi's *Vivir para vivir*, Guillermo Moncayo's *The Event Horizon*, Corin Sworn and Charlotte Prodger's *HDHB*, Kathryn Elkin's *Why La Bamba*, and Kevin Jerome Everson's *Ears, Nose and Throat*.

My top moving-image exhibitions include Philippe Parreno at HangarBicocca, The Inoperative Community at Raven Row, Jean-Paul Kelly at Delfina Foundation, Amar

Kanwar at Frac des Pays de la Loire, and Clemens von Wedemeyer at the Neuer Berliner Kunstverein.

My historical discovery of the year is Jean Matthee's superlative *Neon Queen* (1985). The live performance of Marcos Bertoni's *Cocô Preto* (2003), at Oberhausen, is maybe the most fun I've ever had in a cinema.

## ANNE BILLSON

Critic, Belgium

**The Blackcoat's Daughter**

**(aka February)** *Oz Perkins*

**Hail, Caesar!** *Ethan Coen & Joel Coen*

**Hell or High Water** *David Mackenzie*

**Love & Friendship** *Whit Stillman*

**Our Little Sister** *Koreeda Hirokazu*

● Among the films that might have made my cut had we been allowed ten picks: *De Palma*, *The Invitation*, *Julietta*, *The Shallows* and *Train to Busan*. I also loved Julia Ducournau's *Raw* and Olivier Assayas's *Personal Shopper*, but left them out because they haven't yet gone on wide release.

It was a lousy year for blockbusters, most of which I have already forgotten, but a great one for low(er) budget genre: I enjoyed the hell out of the likes of *10 Cloverfield Lane*, *The Conjuring 2*, *Ouija: Origin of Evil*, *The Purge: Election Year*, *Lights Out* and *Don't Breathe*.

## PETER BRADSHAW

Critic, the Guardian, UK

**Nocturnal Animals** *Tom Ford*

**The Childhood of a**

**Leader** *Brady Corbet*

**I, Daniel Blake** *Ken Loach*

**Divines** *Houda Benyamina*

**American Honey** *Andrea Arnold*

## NICOLE BRENEZ

Professor/curator, France

**Blanche** *Marc Hurlado*

**Bangkok Joyride** *Ing K*

**Welcome to Madagascar**

*Franssou Prenant*



**10 The Death of Louis XIV** *Albert Serra* has made a film somewhat in the contained, stately, solemn manner of Straub-Huillet. Extremely beautiful and even moving, in a rigorously detached way *Jonathan Romney, 'S&S' online, November 2016*



**9 Paterson** A quietly utopian film, and a balm to watch. Its minimal narrative and attractively downbeat setting hark back to the *Jim Jarmusch* of the 80s and 90s.

*Henry K. Miller, 'S&S', December 2016*



**8 Things to Come** *Wry, humane and thoughtful... the film treats its destabilising cluster of crises with extraordinary restraint. It presents the hard, complex business of surviving life in a disarmingly simple way.* *Kate Stables, 'S&S', September 2016*





## THE YEAR IN ... ANIMATION

US animation has had a great run over the past 12 months, both in terms of critical acclaim and box-office success, but to get a true sense of the form's potential one has to look at the work emerging in Europe and Japan. **By Leigh Singer**

Forget superhero, sci-fi or fantasy franchises, the year's most lucrative film collective is animation. Occupying three of the annual top five global box-office slots to date, new films such as Disney Animation's *Zootropolis* (aka *Zootopia*) or Illumination's *The Secret Life of Pets* have proved more popular than pop culture icons Batman, Superman and Jason Bourne. And only the combined Avengers superpowers of Marvel's *Captain America: Civil War* kept *Finding Dory* from the year's top spot, something even Pixar's amnesiac fish might remember.

For all the commercial appeal of these slick, savvy, often visually dazzling works, the bottom line remains that, in the US's dominant industry at least, animation operates within very narrow parameters. It's seen as a genre, not a medium – a distinction I once saw filmmaker Brad Bird (*The Iron Giant*, *Ratatouille*) exasperatedly berate journalists for confusing. Ever since Uncle Walt himself pioneered Disney's



Monkey business: the stop-motion Japanese folklore-inspired *Kubo and the Two Strings*

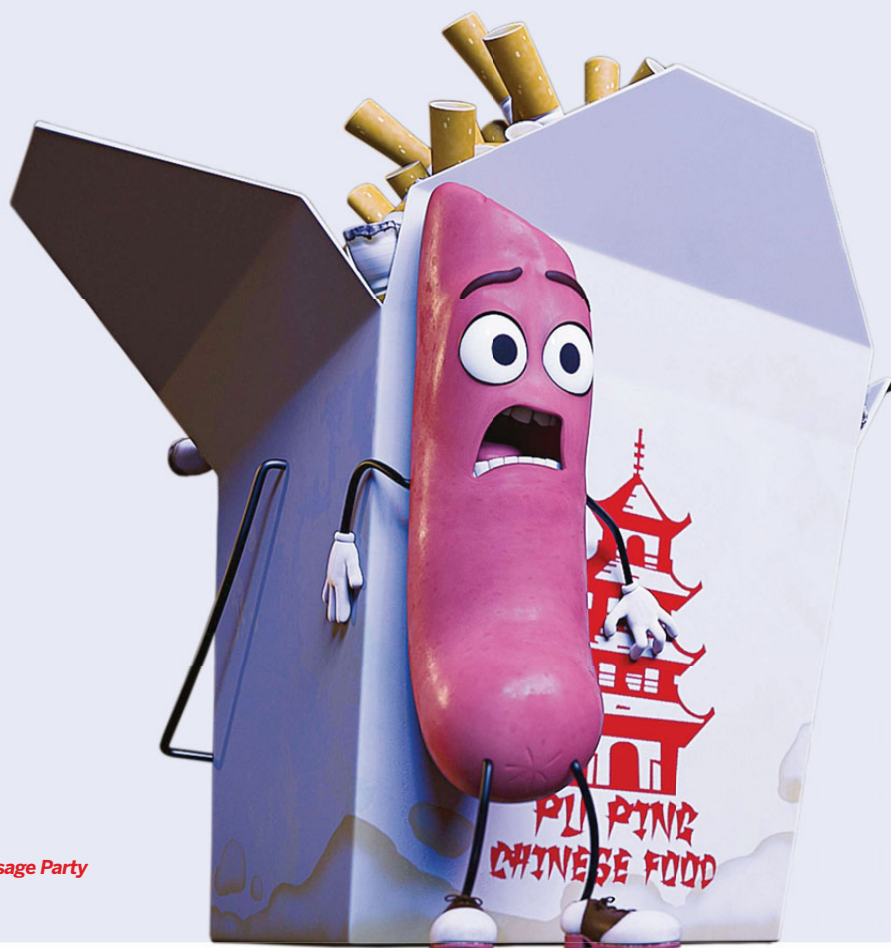
*The outrageous, all too literal food porn climax of 'Sausage Party' was one of the year's comedy highlights*

feature-length cartoons, the form has primarily been a fairytale-appropriating family outlet, teeming with cute talking critters that maximise spin-off kids' merchandising: alongside 2016's biggest hitters add *Kung Fu Panda 3*, *Ice Age: Collision Course*, *The Angry Birds Movie*, *Storks*, *Trolls*, upcoming musical *Sing* and more.

If these films rely on an innately conservative approach to animation's near-limitless possibilities, it isn't an inherent fault. Pixar's golden noughties run included talking toys, monsters and even people within its digital menageries, yet still addressed grown-up human anxieties about separation, loss and mortality. Sure, *The Secret Life of Pets* shamelessly borrows *Toy Story*'s basic premise (admittedly in its own frenetic, freewheeling style), but the inventive comedy-adventure in *Zootropolis* is a canny allegory about a political elite fostering fear and division among different populations to grab power. Would that more live-action films pursued such potent themes, this of all years.

Even homogenised environments can inspire radical voices. Oregon's independent Laika (*Coraline*, *The Boxtrolls*) released the stop-motion Japanese folklore-inspired *Kubo and the Two Strings*, a blend of puppetry and subtle digital enhancement lovingly imbued with indigenous origami and woodblock aesthetics. Sadly, its relatively low-key stylings weren't a multiplex hit. Yet Annapurna Pictures' foul-mouthed, raunchy, metaphysical *Sausage Party* was, its outrageous, all too literal 'food porn' climax one of the year's comedy highlights – and definitely not for kids' consumption.

As ever, though, to get a true sense of



*Sausage Party*





**The Secret Life of Pets**

animation's full potential, one needs to venture further afield. Two superb European efforts premiered at Cannes. Claude Barras's *My Life as a Courgette* is a charming, poignant stop-motion coming-of-age story (adapted by *Girlhood* director Céline Sciamma from a young adult novel), whose orphaned child protagonists have outsize heads and baleful eyes redolent of Tim Burton's animation but whose gritty tragedies cut deeper than that director's gothic whimsy. Michael Dudok de Wit's *The Red Turtle*, a castaway island tale, marks Japanese anime titan Studio Ghibli's debut collaboration outside its borders. It's a harmonious fit, with Dudok de Wit's vivid watercolour style and dialogue-free storytelling embracing nature and silence like the best work of Ghibli co-founders Takahata Isao and Miyazaki Hayao.

Meanwhile the habitual 'new Miyazaki' tag was bestowed upon Shinkai Makoto, for his teen romance/sci-fi body-swap epic *Your Name*, Japan's biggest film of the year. Shinkai's gleaming high-contrast images crackle with a youthful pop vigour (and soundtrack) that differentiate it from traditional Ghibli work. Such international innovators embody a welcome medium diversity. And the sheer global popularity of American product – Disney Animation's resurgence and its progressive princesses, from the *Frozen* sisters to its vibrant Polynesian heroine *Moana* – only confirms the current boom (a record 27 submissions for the 2017 Best Animated Feature Oscar). "We Know the Way", *Moana*'s islanders confidently sing. On current form, one wouldn't bet against them. ☺

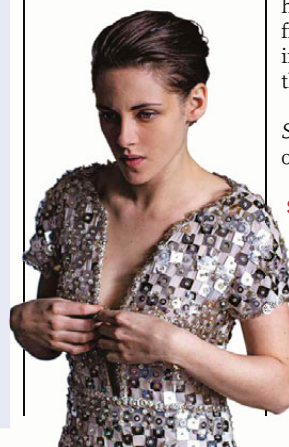


**'Deadpool' made me laugh more than any film this year. It was as insolent and saucy as Lauren Bacall in 'The Big Sleep'**



Mark Cousins

**Personal Shopper**



**I Will Pay for Your Story** Lech Kowalski  
Hinterlands Scott Barley

**MICHEL CIMENT**

Positif editor, France

**Graduation** Cristian Mungiu

**Manchester by the Sea**

Kenneth Lonergan

**The Revenant** Alejandro

González Inárritu

**Toni Erdmann** Maren Ade

**A Woman's Life** Stéphane Brizé

**ASHLEY CLARK**

Critic/programmer, UK/US

**Moonlight** Barry Jenkins

**An Ecstatic Experience** Ja'Tovia Gary

**The Airport** John Akomfrah

**Everybody Wants Some!!**

Richard Linklater

**Peggy and Fred in Hell** Leslie Thornton

**MARK COUSINS**

Filmmaker/critic, UK

**Cemetery of Splendour**

Apichatpong Weerasethakul

**Room** Lenny Abrahamson

**Certain Women** Kelly Reichardt

**Deadpool** Tim Miller

**Mustang** Deniz Gamze Ergüven

● It was a great year for films about escape. *Room*, *Certain Women*, *Mustang* and *Cemetery of Splendour* are all beautiful elopements. The patron saint of imprisonment in cinema, Robert Bresson, would hopefully have loved them. *Deadpool* made me laugh more than any film this year. It was as insolent and saucy as Lauren Bacall in *The Big Sleep*.

As usual, older films were Obi Wan Kenobi guides again this year. The reissue of Godard's *Le Mépris* taught us how to do a daring sound track. I saw, again, Agnès Varda's *Vagabond*, which is like *I, Daniel Blake* directed by Jean-Luc Godard. Surely it's one of the best films ever made? And I rewatched Orson Welles's *Chimes at Midnight*, beautifully restored and audible like never before. It's like seeing a new Tintoretto painting, and as dynamic and irrepressible as, well, *Deadpool*.

And how's this for a magic moment: I watched *Chimes at Midnight* in Welles's daughter's house, then she made me leftovers frittata. As Justice Shallow says in the first line of the film, "Jesus, the days that we have seen."

Also, a quick word about *Sight & Sound*: it has introduced me to lots of films again this year, so thanks.

**STEPHANE DELORME**

Chief editor, *Cahiers du cinéma*, France

**Toni Erdmann** Maren Ade

**Elle** Paul Verhoeven

**The Neon Demon** Nicolas

Winding Refn

**Julieta** Pedro Almodóvar

**Les Bois dont les rêves**

**sont faits** Claire Simon

**GEOFF DYER**

Writer, US

**American Honey** Andrea Arnold

**O.J.: Made in America** Ezra Edelman

**The Handmaiden** Park Chan-wook

**Moonlight** Barry Jenkins

**HyperNormalisation** Adam Curtis

**THE FERRONI BRIGADE**

Writers/programmers/teachers,

Austria/Germany

**Elle** Paul Verhoeven

**My Beloved Bodyguard** Sammo Hung

**The Purge: Election Year**

James DeMonaco

**Seishun 100-Kilo** Hirano Katsuyuki

**The Mobfathers** Herman Yau

**LIZZIE FRANCKE**

Senior production and development

executive, BFI Film Fund, UK

**Aquarius** Kleber Mendonça Filho

**Moonlight** Barry Jenkins

**Raw** Julia Ducourmau

**Toni Erdmann** Maren Ade

**Elle** Paul Verhoeven

● While I could have listed international films which I paid to see in cinemas with audiences this year – *Embrace of the Serpent*, *The Invitation* and *Hunt for the Wilderpeople* were particular favourites – recent events have put me in a projecting forward frame of mind as I think about the point of film in these dark times. The selection here is of films I have seen on the festival circuit which hopefully a wider audience will be able to see in the next few months. (I'm abstaining from British films here because of my job.) All but the Verhoeven are by filmmakers at early stages of their careers, but all can be connected by an extraordinary subjectivity that invites you to step into the shoes of the protagonists and walk or run – or, in the case of *Elle*, follow a complex, wrong-footing dance.

**JEAN-MICHEL FRODON**

Critic (Slate.fr)/professor (Sciences Po Paris, St Andrews), France

**Elle** Paul Verhoeven

**Paterson** Jim Jarmusch

**Fire at Sea** Gianfranco Rosi

**Sieranevada** Cristi Puiu

**Personal Shopper** Olivier Assayas

● There has often been the feeling that many of the best films are now more and more marginalised: in Venice, for instance, you had to dig in sidebars to find gems like *The Road to Mandalay* by Midi Z, *Drum* by Keywan Karimi, or *One More Time with Feeling*, Andrew Dominik's wonderful documentary about Nick Cave. Not to mention one of my favourites, *Olmo and the Seagull* by Petra Costa and Lea Glob, which went totally unnoticed. Which means what happens is less a loss of creativity than an issue of unequal access to visibility. In this respect, it seems that the internet and social media are as much of a problem as a solution.





# THE YEAR IN... OBAMA ERA CINEMA

The closing stages of Barack Obama's tenure have witnessed a new confidence within black film culture, both in the range of subjects being tackled and in a growing refusal to compromise on behalf of white sensibilities. **By Ashley Clark**

The intoxicating feeling of national progress felt by many over the presence of Barack Obama as America's first black president, emboldened liberal-minded filmmakers to engage with traumatic material from a safe remove. Consider the subjects of these backward-looking epics: the failure of post-civil war reconstruction in *The Hateful Eight* (2015); slavery in *Lincoln* (2012), *Django Unchained* (2012) and *12 Years a Slave* (2013); the civil rights movement in *Selma* (2014); the whole shebang in Lee Daniels's expansive *The Butler* (2013), a fictionalised biopic of Eugene Allen, the White House butler who retired after 34 years in 1986, and was present at Obama's inauguration in 2009.

At Sundance 2016, in the early stages of Obama's last year, this trend reached its apotheosis, but felt different. Nate Parker's *The Birth of a Nation* was a spirited reimagining of Nat Turner's slave uprising of 1831, its title cribbed from the racist D.W. Griffith epic, which screened at the White House in 1915. Parker's film, emerging at a time of Black Lives Matter protests against police brutality and economic inequality, sparked a feeding frenzy among distributors, secured a huge deal and won the Grand Jury prize.

Its juggernaut slowed amid lurid revelations about a rape allegation in

the director's past, and a second wave of lukewarm reviews upon release. And yet, though Parker originated the concept in 2009, it's difficult to imagine *The Birth of a Nation* being realised without, in part, the confidence and national conversations inspired by two terms of a black president, not to mention the palpable backlash against him. (The same might be said for the runaway Broadway smash hit *Hamilton*, which features a cast of black and Latino

*'Moonlight' is a subjective look at a black experience, with no hand-holding to court the wallets of white audiences*



Barry Jenkins's *Moonlight*

performers playing white American historical figures.)

The closing stretch of Obama's tenure appears to have infused black-authored and -focused work with a reflective streak that can be seen both narratively and aesthetically. With its story of a driven young black man remaking himself in a new city, Ryan Coogler's stirring, Philadelphia-set *Creed*, released late in 2015, felt like an elegiac riff on Obama's political birth in Chicago. Another clear example is Barry Jenkins's second feature *Moonlight*, a Miami-set triptych about a young gay black man. (Interestingly, Jenkins's debut, the gorgeous romantic drama *Medicine for Melancholy*, was released on January 30 2009, ten days after Obama's inauguration.)

Speaking at the BFI London Film Festival in October, Jenkins conveyed his feeling that, consciously or not, living through the Obama age had emboldened him to make a film with an uncompromisingly subjective look at a black experience, with no hand-holding or code-switching in order to court the eyes (and wallets) of white audiences – it paid off: the film was a critical smash, and drew the biggest per-screen opening average in the US in 2016. *Moonlight* also inspired a fount of beautiful, insightful writing, particularly from black critics. "Did



## RYAN GILBEY

Critic, *New Statesman*, UK

**Further Beyond** Joe Lawlor

**& Christine Molloy**

**Little Men** Ira Sachs

**Ghostbusters** Paul Feig

**Love & Friendship** Whit Stillman

**Embrace of the Serpent** Ciro Guerra

## JANE GILES

Head of BFI Content, UK

**American Honey** Andrea Arnold

**Embrace of the Serpent** Ciro Guerra

**Evolution** Lucile Hadzihalilovic

**Julieta** Pedro Almodóvar

**The Witch** Robert Eggers

● I've only chosen films released in the calendar year, and what struck me again was how many films are on UK release to what feels like no great gain. Do we really need so many subject-driven documentaries on cinema screens occupying much-needed slots for holdovers, word-of-mouth slow burns or great rep programming, and taking up review space?

My two favourite film events both

happened in London in November: John Carpenter playing his scores live at the Troxy and Carl Davis conducting the BFI's digital restoration of *Napoleon* live at the Royal Festival Hall.

## ROBERT GREENE

Filmmaker, USA

**Cameraperson** Kirsten Johnson

**Fire at Sea** Gianfranco Rosi

**HyperNormalisation** Adam Curtis

**Under the Sun** Vitaly Mansky

**Starless Dreams** Mehrdad Oskouei

## MOLLY HASKELL

Author/critic, USA

**20th Century Women** Mike Mills

**Toni Erdmann** Maren Ade

**A Quiet Passion** Terence Davies

**Hell or High Water** David Mackenzie

**Things to Come** Mia Hansen-Løve

● I've restricted my five to 2016, and there are a lot I haven't yet seen. Revelations from the past were two silent films by Frank Borzage: *Back Pay* and *The Pride of Palomar* (both 1922). They make you

understand once again why those who'd known only silent cinema resisted the coming of sound.

## J. HOBERMAN

Critic, USA

**O.J.: Made in America** Ezra Edelman

**Toni Erdmann** Maren Ade

**Kaili Blues** Bi Gan

**The Death of Louis XIV** Albert Serra

**Neruda** Pablo Larraín

## JOANNA HOGG

Filmmaker/curator, UK

**Toni Erdmann** Maren Ade

**Certain Women** Kelly Reichardt

**Personal Shopper** Olivier Assayas

**La La Land** Damien Chazelle

**But Elsewhere Is Always**

**Better** Vivian Ostrovsky

## ALEXANDER HORWATH

Director, Austrian Film Museum, Austria

**Toni Erdmann** Maren Ade

**Neruda** Pablo Larraín

**The Woman Who Left** Lav Diaz

**Things to Come** Mia Hansen-Løve

## Elle Paul Verhoeven

**The Dreamed Ones** Ruth Beckermann

● Strangely, the title of one film on my list seems to encapsulate all five: *The Dreamed Ones*. It speaks about the ways in which some great filmmakers have become acutely sensitive to a central condition of life today: a sort of pulsating unreality in which the forces of fantasy, imaginative (and often stressful) self-design and 'self-improvement', apocalyptic fears and a deep social unease (or social-networked unease) all condense toward the only form of reality we have at our disposal. The 'we' in question being mainly the Western liberal bourgeoisie, but also, to a degree, that of our unfortunate victims and brethren in less 'enlightened' circumstances. In this group of films, Pablo Larraín's poet/activist Neruda and the police inspector on his trail, as well as Ruth Beckermann's poets in love (Ingeborg Bachmann and Paul Celan), figure as the historical, circa 1948, avatars of our own present condition.



I ever imagine, during my anxious, closeted childhood, that I'd live long enough to see a movie like *Moonlight*?" asked the *New Yorker*'s Hilton Als. With regard to Jenkins's observation, Obama must share credit for the presence of such life-affirming art.

In 2016, explicit Obama nostalgia characterised two fictionalised biopics by independent filmmakers: rare if not unprecedented treatment for a serving president. Richard Tanne's *Southside with You* whimsically reimagined Barack's first date with the future first lady, while Vikram Gandhi's low-key *Barry* tracked Obama as he was defining himself intellectually and forging his identity as a student in the early 1980s. The films contrast tonally but, especially when watched back to back, impart a powerful, rueful charge.

Obama's impact was felt away from conventional cinema in 2016. "Before I met [Obama], I ain't really see myself going nowhere, you know, I ain't really care if I lived or died," says a young black man in a scene during Beyoncé's innovative 'visual album' *Lemonade*, which was shock-released to great fanfare on April 23. "Now I feel like I gotta live, man, for my kids and stuff." *Lemonade* was one of many examples of final-year-of-Obama art to look at black experience with subjectivity and creative flair, from



Fizzing with talent: Beyoncé's innovative visual album *Lemonade*

Donald Glover's brilliantly strange FX show *Atlanta*, to a mini-revival of classic, under-appreciated films from the LA Rebellion (including Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*, an acknowledged influence on *Lemonade*), and the black stars of micro-blogging site Vine which, in the words of the *New York Times*'s Jazmine Hughes, "became its own ecosystem of black culture, both by relying on familiar figures, experiences and jokes, and by creating the next batch of them."

Well, in October, Twitter announced that it was closing Vine. A month later, a racist, sexist reality TV star was announced as Obama's successor. As Trumpageddon heaves into view, it's hard to know which direction black visual art will take: a further push into subjective, psychologically interior territory; or more explicit politics? Either way, black visual culture in the last year of Obama will be picked over poignantly for decades to come. ☹

#### NICK JAMES

Editor, *Sight & Sound*, UK

**Toni Erdmann** Maren Ade

**Elle** Paul Verhoeven

**Fire at Sea** Gianfranco Rosi

**Embrace of the Serpent** Ciro Guerra

**Paterson** Jim Jarmusch

A rotten year, but not for cinema. That films as imaginative as that spare portrait of an awkward young black girl, *The Fits*, or Barry Jenkins's moody depiction of a black gay outsider, *Moonlight*, or Natalie Portman's searing portrayal of JFK's first lady, *Jackie* don't make my five indicates how strong it was. Also of note was *Manchester by the Sea*, a blue collar high tragedy with wrenching performances that weigh the balance so carefully between the push and pull of guilt and responsibility that the film is emotionally exhausting. *Fire at Sea* found a fresh way of viewing the immigrants risking their lives in lethal boats on the Mediterranean. *Paterson* was just the most soulful, quiet local neighbourhood pleasure

at Cannes and *Toni Erdmann* the most outlandishly unforeseen comedy of manners. *Elle* is a watershed film, the most involving psychological thriller in years, and *Embrace of the Serpent* felt like a rethinking of so much adventure cinema from the last half century. Cinema did the seductive part of its function well, taking us out of ourselves, and how we needed that.

#### DAVID JENKINS

Editor, *Little White Lies*, UK

**Toni Erdmann** Maren Ade

**Certain Women** Kelly Reichardt

**Happy Hour** Hamaguchi Ryusuke

**Voyage of Time: Life's**

**Journey** Terrence Malick

**Everybody Wants Some!!**

Richard Linklater

● *Toni Erdmann* was not only my favourite film by a comfortable margin, but it also goes some way in reaffirming (sick buckets at the ready) cinema as a communal experience. Maybe this is reflective of my own lack of valuable life experience, but the

Cannes press screening felt more like a raucous Southern Baptist sermon than a conventional trip to the pictures. The studios would do well to look at this movie to understand how you cultivate a sense of awe. Documentary plaudits go to Christine Molloy and Joe Lawlor's *Further Beyond*. And the award for movie that defies binary categorisations of good and bad, the one I have no idea whether I loved or loathed, but have pretty much thought about every day since seeing, is Bertrand Bonello's *Nocturama*.

#### KENT JONES

Writer/filmmaker/festival director, US

**Toni Erdmann** Maren Ade

**13th** Ava DuVernay

**Silence** Martin Scorsese

**The Lost City of Z** James Gray

**Paterson** Jim Jarmusch

#### KOGONADA

Filmmaker/essayist, US

**Moonlight** Barry Jenkins

**Certain Women** Kelly Reichardt

#### Little Men Ira Sachs

**Paterson** Jim Jarmusch

**Manchester by the Sea**

Kenneth Lonergan

● In light of the coming Trump presidency, here are five American films that suggest a growing sensibility and taste for the quiet, the reflective, the complex, the spare, the humane. More than ever these kind of films matter.

#### EH SAN KHOSHBAKHT

Critic and curator, UK/Iran

**Sieranevada** Cristi Puiu

**Fire at Sea** Gianfranco Rosi

**Sweet Dreams** Marco Bellocchio

**Nocturama** Bertrand Bonello

**The Brick and the Mirror**

Ebrahim Golestan

● I have smuggled on to the list one film revived from the past: *The Brick and the Mirror* (1965), which is by far the most stylistically daring film I have revisited (and occasionally presented and screened) in 2016. Golestan's bleak



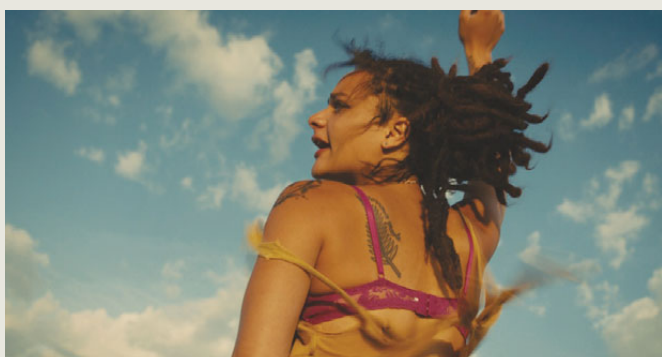




**7 Manchester by the Sea** *A blue collar high tragedy with wrenching performances that weigh the balance so carefully between the push and pull between guilt and responsibility that the film is emotionally exhausting.* Nick James



**6 I, Daniel Blake** *Ken Loach's film is perhaps the most important film of the year in relation to the situation in a post-Brexit Britain. The fact that it has connected so powerfully with audiences is a tonic for the soul.* Jason Wood



**5 American Honey** *As much spectacle as a Hollywood musical. Within a collage of soaring music, soft light and writhing bodies, this brilliant film draws the outline of a bleak economic landscape.* Pamela Hutchinson, 'S&S', November 2016

masterpiece, arguably the best of Iranian pre-revolutionary cinema, captures an atmosphere of political anxiety and paranoia and transforms it into a timeless image of any society governed and manipulated on the basis of fear of the other – more or less a mirror held in front of us at this troubled moment in the 21st century. But this also reminded me of the fact that in a year that was cinematically (and otherwise) not so great, it was revivals and retrospectives which made life more pleasant. Life-changing retrospectives included the exhilarating 'Deutschland 1966' (Berlinale) and the glorious, all-35mm 'Universal Pictures: The Laemmle Junior Years' (Il Cinema Ritrovato). The latter featured the most poignant piece of social realist cinema of the depression era, *Laughter in Hell* (Edward L. Cahn, 1933), which remains for me the unsurpassed discovery of the year.

#### DANNY LEIGH

Writer/journalist/broadcaster, UK

**American Honey** *Andrea Arnold*

**Creed** *Ryan Coogler*

**Embrace of the Serpent** *Ciro Guerra*

**Evolution** *Lucile Hadzihalilovic*

**Nocturama** *Bertrand Bonello*

● I decided to draw a thick line in permanent marker excluding some extraordinary films I've seen this year but which are coming out theatrically in Britain next year, and would otherwise have made this list: *The Fits*, *Elle*, *Personal Shopper*, *Moonlight*. (I had premonitions of most of next year's poll being exactly the same as most of this one, which troubled me).

#### DENNIS LIM

Director of programming at the Film Society of Lincoln Center, US

**Nocturama** *Bertrand Bonello*

**The Human Surge** *Eduardo Williams*

**Toni Erdmann** *Maren Ade*

**The Death of Louis XIV** *Albert Serra*

**Elle** *Paul Verhoeven*

● Plus five shorts: *Sarah Winchester*, *Opéra Fantôme* (Bertrand Bonello), *Cilaos* (Camilo Restrepo), *Foyer* (Ismail Bahri), *Indefinite Pitch* (James N. Kienitz Wilkins) and *A Brief History of Princess X* (Gabriel Abrantes)

#### DANA LINSEN

Editor in chief de *Filmkrant*/critic *NRC Handelsblad*, The Netherlands

**Shadow World** *Johan Grimonprez*

**My Life as a Courgette** *Claude Barras*

**Fire at Sea** *Gianfranco Rosi*

**Toni Erdmann** *Maren Ade*

**Sausage Party** *Greg Tiernan & Conrad Vernon*

● Once again a year in which some of the most exciting cinematic things and some other reveries of the mediated world happened outside the black boxes that were once known as cinemas: 1. *Fever Room*:

Apichatpong Weerasethakul's cine-theatre performance that turned the spectator into a screen and saw Plato's shadows laughing in the distance (at the Kunstenfestivaldesarts in Brussels); 2. 'Subtle Beast': episode two of HBO's *The Night Of*, directed by Steven Zaillian, with Igor Martinovic as director of photography, offering neverending explorations in a shallow depth of field; 3. *HyperNormalisation* directed by Adam Curtis (on BBC iPlayer); 4. *Into the Inferno* (on Netflix): if the world didn't exist Werner Herzog would have to invent it; 5. *Atomic*: Mark Cousins and Mogwai (at the Holland Festival in Amsterdam) – it did get loud!; 6. 'Master of Light': the Robby Müller Exhibition at EYE in Amsterdam, in which the exhibition space became one big installation piece, and it worked; 7. Pokémon GO!

#### CHARLIE LYNE

Filmmaker/critic, UK

**Cameraperson** *Kirsten Johnson*

**Christine** *Antonio Campos*

**Fraud** *Dean Fleischer-Camp*

**Parents** *Christian Tafdrup*

**Elle** *Paul Verhoeven*

● I've chosen to pinpoint those films which – regardless of their overall merits – connected with me most vividly. My favourite film of the year, *Cameraperson*, contained many such moments, not least its lightning-in-a-bottle opening title sequence, in which the entirety of human existence seemed effortlessly distilled into a single sneeze.

#### DEREK MALCOLM

Critic, UK

**The Woman Who Left** *Lav Diaz*

**Graduation** *Cristian Mungiu*

**Toni Erdmann** *Maren Ade*

**Nocturnal Animals** *Tom Ford*

**Paterson** *Jim Jarmusch*

● The more I think about it the more I admire the surprise winner of the Golden Lion at Venice: *The Woman Who Left*. It is a film that lives in the memory as a moral, political and cultural statement as well as a fine piece of filmmaking.

#### MIGUEL MARIAS

Critic/teacher, Spain

**The Son of Joseph** *Eugène Green*

**Don't Tell Me the Boy Was**

**Mad** *Robert Guédiguian*

**The Sea of Trees** *Gus Van Sant*

**Malgré la nuit** *Philippe Grandrieux*

**Meurtrière** *Philippe Grandrieux*

#### NICO MARZANO

Programmer, ICA London, UK

**The Student** *Kirill Serebrennikov*

**Behemoth** *Zhao Liang*

**Fire at Sea** *Gianfranco Rosi*

**Dark Night** *Tim Sutton*

**Heartstone** *Gudmundur Arnar Gudmundsson*

● Also notable is Marcin Koszalka's



*The Red Spider*, an impressive story of a young man fascinated by the impulse of evil. Marcos Prado's *Curumim* is a shocking documentary about champion paraglider and drug dealer Marco 'Curumim' Archer. Tamer El Said's *In The Last Days of the City* beautifully captures the mood of a city, Cairo, and of its people during such a troubled historical period for Egypt.

#### DANIELA MICHEL

Director, Morelia International Film Festival, Mexico

**Elle** Paul Verhoeven

**A Journey Through French Cinema** Bertrand Tavernier

**Fire at Sea** Gianfranco Rosi

**I, Daniel Blake** Ken Loach

**Graduation** Cristian Mungiu

#### KATE MUIR

Chief film critic, the Times, UK

**Manchester by the Sea**

Kenneth Lonergan

**Fire at Sea** Gianfranco Rosi

**Moonlight** Barry Jenkins

**American Honey** Andrea Arnold

**Toni Erdmann** Maren Ade

#### NASREEN MUNNI KABIR

Documentary filmmaker/author, UK

**I, Daniel Blake** Ken Loach

**Aligarh** Hansal Mehta

**The Childhood of a Leader** Brady Corbet

**The Revenant** Alejandro

González Inárritu

**Elle** Paul Verhoeven

#### ANDREA PICARD

Film curator, TIFF, Canada

**Sieranevada** Cristi Puiu

**The Death of Louis XIV** Albert Serra

**The Dreamed Path** Angela Schanelec

**Nocturama** Bertrand Bonello

**Certain Women** Kelly Reichardt

#### JOHN POWERS

Critic, Vogue, USA

**Toni Erdmann** Maren Ade

**Moonlight** Barry Jenkins

**The Handmaiden** Park Chan-wook

**20th Century Women** Mike Mills

**O.J.: Made in America** Ezra Edelman

#### JAMES QUANDT

Curator/critic, Canada

**From the Branches Drops the Withered Blossom** Paul Meyer

**Sieranevada** Cristi Puiu

**The Death of Louis XIV** Albert Serra

**The Ornithologist** João Pedro Rodrigues

**Ma' Rosa** Brillante Mendoza

● The film event of the year was the complete retrospective of the films of Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

#### NAMAN RAMACHANDRAN

Critic, UK/India

**The Neon Demon** Nicolas Winding Refn

**I, Daniel Blake** Ken Loach

**Toni Erdmann** Maren Ade

**Your Name** Makoto Shinkai

**A Billion Colour Story**

Padmakumar Narasimhamurthy

● Despite it being an *annus horribilis* due to some unexpected world events, it has been an extraordinary year for cinema, with a wide range of highlights. The icing on the cake personally was travelling the world, beginning with Sundance, with a film I wrote and executive produced, *Brahman Naman*, and getting photobombed by Werner Herzog in the process.

#### KONG RITHDEE

Critic, the Bangkok Post, Thailand

**Mimosas** Oliver Laxe

**The Ornithologist** João Pedro Rodrigues

**The Woman Who Left** Lav Diaz

**Toni Erdmann** Maren Ade

**Elle** Paul Verhoeven

● *Mimosas* is a parable about a human quest through the landscape of God and the devil, with a Sufi prophet/Moroccan Don Quixote as guide. What's most remarkable is how time and space are flipped in and out, as only cinema and Arab raconteurs can. *The Ornithologist* offered a fevered reverie, beginning as a National Geographic showreel and morphing with rugged elegance into a fable of erotic transcendence. President Duterte or not, senseless deaths on the streets or not: Lav Diaz's *The Woman Who Left* never tries to catch a rabbit – he always goes for the dragon in its lair. The theme is big: humanity, guilt, crime, punishment, injustice, despair – the Filipino despair, or maybe the South-East Asian despair, drenched in the sweat and blood of the common man.

#### JONATHAN ROMNEY

Critic, UK

**Toni Erdmann** Maren Ade

**Scarred Hearts** Radu Jude

**The Death of Louis XIV** Albert Serra

**The Woman Who Left** Lav Diaz

**Midnight Special** Jeff Nichols

● In any obvious sense, the real film of the year was one that didn't make my top five, but that spoke painfully and with clarion immediacy about the lamentable state of Tory-run Britain – *I, Daniel Blake*. I'm implicitly voting for it in my number one choice, *Toni Erdmann* – since, apart from being a comedy and a very human delight, Maren Ade's film is also, it shouldn't be forgotten, an intensely angry political statement about the way that capitalism – and specifically, corporate culture and its languages – disempower, dehumanise and alienate. Both films are conveying the same urgent message, albeit in radically different cinematic languages.

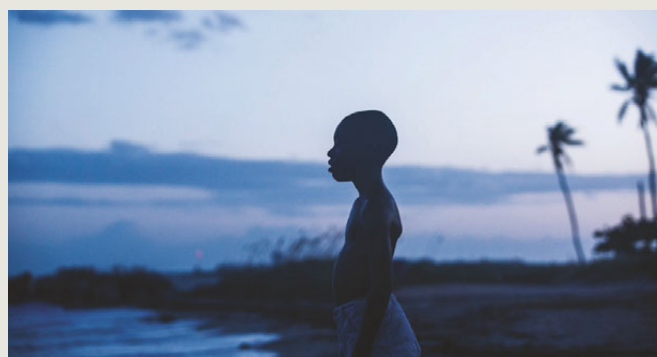
One of my other choices here stands for the two Lav Diaz



**4 Certain Women** Kelly Reichardt articulates a familiar experience: the suspicion, bafflement or plain disregard met by women who don't conform to typical notions of femininity, as held by certain men. Sophie Brown (published in the full online poll)



**3 Elle** Trust Verhoeven to venture where most wouldn't dare: a psychological rape-revenge fantasy thriller laced with comedy. What should be problematic is here more complicated and intelligent than it first appears. Nick James, 'S&S', July 2016



**2 Moonlight** A film about the complexity of black masculinity and the very human hunger for connection. It is about the fragility that lies beneath a man's swagger. Thrilling and sensuous. Simran Hans, 'S&S' online, September 2016



films I saw in 2016, the other being the flawed, wayward *A Lullaby to the Sorrowful Mystery*, but my vote for his Venice prize-winner is also a vote for an exemplary continuing adventure in filmmaking as passionate mission. Other films that made 2016 for me included: *The Untamed*, *The Son of Joseph*, *Personal Shopper*, *Elle*, *Fire at Sea*, *Paterson*, Ivo Ferreira's underrated *Letters from War*, Nele Wohlatz's joyously deadpan comedy about language *The Future Perfect*, Bertrand Bonello's dazzling if contentious *Nocturama*, and the first Marvel film I've cared about in a long time, *Doctor Strange* – which, like Jeff Nichols's *Midnight Special*, represented a vote of faith in the screen possibilities of the digital sublime.

#### JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

Freelance writer, blogger and teacher, USA

**The Day Before the End** *Lav Diaz*  
**Everybody Wants Some!!**

*Richard Linklater*

**Aragane** *Oda Kaori*

**Paterson** *Jim Jarmusch*

**The Death of Louis XIV** *Albert Serra*

● The first on my list, a short, I caught at the estimable Filmadrid; the third, a documentary by a former FilmFactory student of mine, I saw via a Vimeo link. Worth runners-up would include João Nicolau's *John From*, Barry Jenkins's *Moonlight*, Whit Stillman's *Love & Friendship* and Kurosawa Kiyoshi's *Journey to the Shore* – and perhaps certain other contenders I haven't yet caught up with.

#### MEENAKSHI SHEDDE

South Asia consultant, Berlin and Dubai Film Festivals; India curator to the BFI, India

**The Salesman** *Asghar Farhadi*

**In the Last Days of the City** *Tamer El Said*

**Cold of Kalandar** *Mustafa Kara*

**Dark Wind** *Hussein Hassan*

**A Death in the Gunj** *Konkona Sensharma*

#### FERNANDA SOLORZANO

Critic, Mexico

**Elle** *Paul Verhoeven*

**La La Land** *Damien Chazelle*

**Jackie** *Pablo Larraín*

**Beauties of the Night** *María José Cuevas*

**Sand Storm** *Elite Zexer*

● Although it's just a coincidence, four of my five picks portray unconventional women who defy expectations (and shock a few in the process.). The most extreme is Verhoeven's *Elle*. Also unexpected is Pablo Larraín's *Jackie*, an unsettling deconstruction of the mythic first lady that shows her journey from being a wife with pedigree to becoming the moral core of a nation devastated by grief. María José Cuevas's debut documentary *Beauties of the Night* also deals with drastic evolutions: it tells the story of five women who were

Mexico's top showgirls during the 70s and 80s, and eventually faced some kind of downfall. Also an impressive debut, *Sand Storm* is a meticulously scripted drama about two Bedouin women from different generations dealing with the male-imposed customs that define their lives. Israeli filmmaker Elite Zexer eschews melodrama in favour of character construction: both the women and men are dignified, sensible people who consider the possible outcomes of their actions. The odd one out in the women-themed group is *La La Land*. Accomplished in every aspect, it's both a homage to and a rewriting of Hollywood's classic musicals. Only the harshest cynics will resist this film's bittersweet charm.

#### FRANCINE STOCK

Presenter, Radio 4,

*The Film Programme*, UK

**Things to Come** *Mia Hansen-Løve*

**The Club** *Pablo Larraín*

**Dheepan** *Jacques Audiard*

**The Jungle Book** *Jon Favreau*

**Victoria** *Sebastian Schipper*

● All of my top five achieve considerable emotional and narrative impact through very different but beautifully executed styles. It was a year when some of the most highly anticipated films failed to deliver; on the other hand, there were distinctive, memorable pleasures, whether for children, like *Zootropolis* and *Kubo and the Two Strings*, or not – like Luca Guadagnino's *A Bigger Splash*, Ciro Guerra's *Embrace of the Serpent* or Tom Geens's *Couple in a Hole*.

#### AMY TAUBIN

Critic, USA

**Moonlight** *Barry Jenkins*

**Toni Erdmann** *Maren Ade*

**Everything Else** *Natalia Almada*

**I Am Not Your Negro** *Raoul Peck*

**O.J.: Made in America** *Ezra Edelman*

#### GINETTE VINCENTAU

Professor in film studies, UK

**Merci patron!** *François Ruffin*

**Toni Erdmann** *Maren Ade*

**The Unknown Girl** *Jean-*

*Paul and Luc Dardenne*

**Julieta** *Pedro Almodóvar*

**In Bed with Victoria (aka**

**Victoria)** *Justine Triet*

● I didn't do it on purpose but four of my five films this year are portraits of women in a range of genres, from popular comedy (*Victoria*) to tense drama (*The Unknown Girl*). The most complex (not an accident) are directed by women. But all have great actresses – my personal Palme d'Or would be shared between Sandra Hüller in *Toni Erdmann*, Adèle Haenel in *The Unknown Girl* and Virginie Efira in *In Bed with Victoria*. *Merci patron!* is the funniest political film.

“

**It was a year when some of the most highly anticipated films failed to deliver, but there were memorable pleasures**

”

Francine Stock

## THE YEAR IN ... TELEVISION

*The growth of quality programming shows no sign of abating, but as viewing fractures across an array of devices, it's no longer clear precisely what television means any more*

By Lisa Kerrigan

Have you been watching? And, if so, how could you possibly keep up? As so-called peak TV continued to climb in 2016, with new programmes, returning series and revivals all clamouring for attention on an ever-growing array of video on demand, cable, satellite and Freeview outlets, it felt as though the TV viewing experience was fracturing too. In the UK, a BBC channel disappeared from linear broadcast altogether as BBC Three went online in search of the growing audiences for BBC iPlayer. The TV viewing requests those audiences make are split across computers, tablets, internet TVs and other service providers, which raises the question – what and where is television?

In the midst of this technological tumult, the year's major dramas turned to the past, both for comfort and for answers about the present. *The People v. O.J. Simpson: American Crime Story* offered well-known events and characters that became fascinating all over again through the alchemy of great performances and its signature blend of camp, comedy and heartfelt melodrama. Channel 4's pitch for topical historical drama was writer Jack Thorne and director Mark Munden's *National Treasure*, in which a famous comedian (Robbie Coltrane) undergoes a Yewtree-style investigation into allegations of rape and abuse. More striking and savage was the channel's single drama *Ellen*, about a teen growing up in an inner-city estate, in which writer Sarah Quintrell showed with a dramatic sleight of hand that past events and attitudes can only be truly understood when their consequences are reckoned with.

The BBC had two single dramas based on tragic true stories: Jimmy McGovern's *Reg*, about Reg Keys, who stood against Tony Blair as an anti-war MP in the 2005 general election after his son was killed serving in the British army during the Iraq war; and *Damilola, Our Loved Boy*, about the murder of 10-year-old Damilola Taylor in South London and written by Levi

Julieta







Unfulfilled dreams and eternal youth: the most poignant episode of *Black Mirror* was 'San Junipero'

David Addai. In its flagship Sunday night drama slot, the BBC waged *War & Peace* and it was both epic and intimate in scope. *The Night Manager*, adapted from John le Carré's novel and directed by Susanne Bier, gave glossy thrills, but the revenge enacted by its main character (played by Tom Hiddleston) paled in comparison with the weight carried by another scarred hero on BBC1, Catherine Cawood (Sarah Lancashire) in writer Sally Wainwright's second series of crime drama *Happy Valley*.

Against a backdrop of national upheaval in Britain, regal history remained steadfast and assumed a respectful glamour in both ITV's *Victoria* and Netflix's most expensive series to date, *The Crown*. The sheer scale of *The Crown* was indicative of the growth of Netflix's original programming, which produced two of the year's most entertaining dramas in *Stranger Things* and *The Get Down*. Set in the 1980s, *Stranger Things* leans on influences including Spielberg and Stephen King in ways which led me to wonder if it had actually been created by Netflix's own recommendation algorithm. But the Duffer Brothers' nightmare world – termed the Upside Down – and their ebullient young cast linger in the memory just like the sources

of their inspiration. Baz Luhrmann's *The Get Down* tells the story of the genesis of hip-hop and the emergence of the modern New York in the style of *West Side Story*, with added disco tracks. These series envisage the recent past as ripe for reinvention and remixing, even as their celebration of analogue media in the form of telephones, walkie-talkies, records and mix tapes is served up through a streaming digital platform. Towards the end

*Have you been watching television? And, if so, how could you possibly keep up?*



*Happy Valley*

of the year a new series of Charlie Brooker's *Black Mirror* landed on Netflix, having gone viral from its original home on Channel 4. Despite its reliance on dystopias, the most poignant episode of the new series, 'San Junipero', also sought solace in the 1980s and 1990s as a place for unfulfilled dreams and eternal youth.

HBO's *Westworld*, based on Michael Crichton's 1973 film, takes a more literal approach to visiting the past as a tourist, and makes the ethical pitfalls involved in creating characters and entertainment its very subject. Other straightforward revivals had varying degrees of success. Audiences proved more grateful than most critics for the return of Mulder and Scully in *The X-Files*, while ITV's *Cold Feet* found an appreciative audience, a feeling which will surely be replicated with Netflix's soon-to-be-released *Gilmore Girls* reunion. HBO also had success with *The Night Of*, starring Riz Ahmed, an ambitious remake of the first series of the BBC's *Criminal Justice*.

In 2016 even comedy tended towards the melancholic, with a cluster of tragicomic heroines creating and starring in their own series, including Phoebe Waller-Bridge with the BBC's *Fleabag*, Tig Notaro with Amazon's *One Mississippi* and Issa Rae with HBO's *Insecure*. E4's *Chewing Gum*, written by and starring Michaela Coel, was first broadcast in 2015 but has recently been released on Netflix in the US and fits the same mould. It seems notable that the creators of these shows have backgrounds in stand-up comedy, theatre and web series – perhaps reflecting a flexibility in comedy commissioning, but also highlighting ways in which other mediums enable women to put themselves centre stage.

Beyond reflective dramas and comedies tinged with sadness, the watercooler moments which used to be the hallmark of television viewing may now be reserved for events which require live viewing for results in real time – namely sport and light entertainment, where viewing figures remain buoyant. In a year of relentless, tumultuous news, national headlines were briefly dominated by a televised baking competition and its switch from one channel to another. As almost 15 million viewers watched the final edition of *The Great British Bake Off* on BBC1 the message from audiences was clear: let us eat cake. ☺



## THE YEAR IN ... HORROR

In a year in which minorities have come under increasing attack, have horror films tried merely to reflect cultural concerns or do they share some culpability for encouraging the demonisation of 'the other'? **By Kim Newman**



**Queen of pentacles:** Anna Biller's *The Love Witch* blurs the lines of strict horror

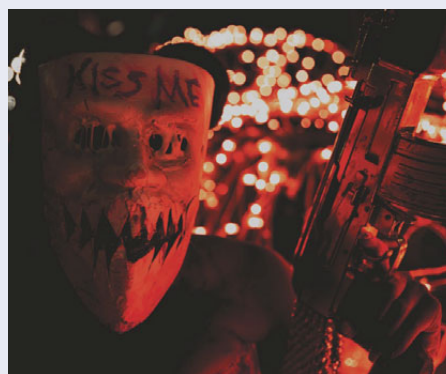
The all-too-evident horrors of 2016 will probably not be fully reflected by horror cinema until later in 2017 and beyond – with the real world consistently one-upping its imagined, distorted reflection by being worse than anyone imagined. James DeMonaco's dystopian franchise entry *The Purge: Election Year* ends with a maniacal demagogue and his patriarchal, brutally sexist backers routed, and the idealistic anti-purge female candidate elected to the presidency.

All the op-ed pieces about the revenge of the disaffected, overlooked and ignored voter and the rising tide of plague-on-both-your-houses abstention from the democratic process will inevitably feed into horror movies sooner or later... though there's also the question of how culpable the genre is for the way things are as a result of its demonisation of the 'other', even if in ambivalent tones. In the meantime, perhaps we can discern the beginnings of President Trump-era horror in such disparate films as Jeremy Saulnier's *Green Room*, Brady Corbet's *The Childhood of a Leader*, Dan Trachtenberg's leftfield franchise extension *10 Cloverfield Lane*, Adam Rifkin's exceptionally clever

postmodern exercise *Director's Cut*, Kurosawa Kiyoshi's quease-inducing *Creepy* and Fede Alvarez's home invasion turnaround thriller *Don't Breathe*. All of them are about being trapped in hard-to-escape homes that present nightmarish versions of family normality, with a dangerous, petulant, aggressively male tyrant enforcing a political agenda which provides a thin rationale for psychotic violence and exploitation.

In the present moment, even films about women trapped by sharks (*The Shallows*, 47

*Meters Down*) seem like allegories – though the dominant theme of a surprising number of films (perhaps influenced by *The Babadook*) is embattled motherhood, as women have very bad times trying to protect children from an assortment of menaces in a wide range of films, including *Under the Shadow*, *Paranormal Drive*, *Monolith*, *White Coffin* and *The Monster*. *Train to Busan* unusually featured a father trying to redeem himself by saving his child from zombies, though Yeon Sang-ho's animated companion piece



**The Purge: Election Year**



**10 Cloverfield Lane**



*Seoul Station* is far more ambiguous about its obsessive father figure – fitting in with the trend for brutal, yet also inept patriarchs.

Unfashionable signs of hope appear in Colm McCarthy's *The Girl with All the Gifts*, adapted by Mike Carey from his own novel – in which a young heroine who is also a monster learns to protect herself and also to accept and shape the changed world rather than fall back on a need to be saved – but also defined – by adults. The chic satanic anti-heroine of Anna Biller's *The Love Witch* and the strange spawn boys of Lucile Hadzihalilovic's *Evolution* – significantly, films by rather than about women – find their own spaces, wriggling within the confines of strict horror to blur the genre lines in a haunting manner. Similarly, the living and dead ghost women of Oz Perkins's *I Am the Pretty Thing That Lives in the House*, the antagonistic female friends of Alex Ross Perry's *Queen of Earth*, the incorruptible body on the slab in André Øvredal's *The Autopsy of Jane Doe* and the captive who commands in Carles Torrens's *Pet*, interrogate the confining roles of women in horror – all straining against states of captivity or confinement.

A few films focused closely on topical

*A number of films interrogate the confining roles of women in horror – straining against states of captivity or confinement*

issues, from the inevitable rash of social-media-themed hauntings (*Friend Request*), deals with the Devil (*i-LIVED*) or ordeals (*Nerve*) and a remarkable 'broken Britain' rethink of Sweeney Todd in an era of binge-drinking and dodgy kebabs (*K-Shop*). Attempts to revive past glories proved decidedly mixed – with remakes so unneeded that greenlighting them might be some situationist prank (new versions of *Martyrs*, *Cabin Fever* and *Blood Feast*), and reboots like the all-woman, alt-right-baiting *Ghostbusters* and the gleefully silly *Sadako vs Kayako* making noise but not really casting light. Elaborate beyond-a-joke pointlessness is also a trait of mid-2010s genre cinema – as exemplified by the damp squib of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Zombies* and the makeshift below-the-radar nonsense of *Sharkenstein* or *Shark Exorcist*. 📌



**As the mainstream media befouls itself, fewer and fewer serious film critics are being supported**



Armond White



The highlight of my cinematic year not to do with recent releases was seeing *L'Affaire de la rue de Lourcine* (1923) a comedy starring a brilliant young Maurice Chevalier, with live piano, at the wonderful Fondation Jérôme Seydoux-Pathé in Paris.

#### CATHERINE WHEATLEY

Senior lecturer in film studies, King's College London, UK

**Toni Erdmann** Maren Ade

**Baden Baden** Rachel Lang

**Wild** Nicolette Krebitz

**Certain Women** Kelly Reichardt

**Things to Come** Mia Hansen-Løve

#### ARMOND WHITE

Critic, *National Review* & *OUT* magazine, USA

**Being 17** André Téchiné

**The President** Mohsen Makhmalbaf

**Sunset Song** Terence Davies

**Wiener-Dog** Todd Solondz

**Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice** Zack Snyder

● The decline of criticism is the big news this year. As the Mainstream Media (MSM) befouls itself, fewer and fewer serious film critics are being supported and the public just doesn't seem to care. The MSM is taken over by cronyism and consumerism. There is no more diversity among cinephiles. Here's the news that MSM doesn't report: popular cinema and TV are a wasteland. This era should

be a new golden age for art movies. Téchiné, Makhmalbaf, Davies and Solondz are leading the way; Zack Snyder is the only maker of 'popular' films who has a vision and sensibility that stirs great feeling and profound thought. The festival circuit and MSM 'criticism' promote film culture's decline. God help us all.

#### JASON WOOD

Artistic director, HOME, UK

**Toni Erdmann** Maren Ade

**Notes on Blindness** Peter

Middleton and James Spinney

**Certain Women** Kelly Reichardt

**Moonlight** Barry Jenkins

**I, Daniel Blake** Ken Loach

● I regret finding no space for *Embrace of the Serpent*, *A Quiet Passion* or *Fire at Sea*. I found this a strong year for UK cinema with *I Am Belfast*, *Couple in a Hole*, *Prevenge*, *Lady Macbeth*, *The Ghoul*, *Norfolk* and *The Survivalist* impressing. Loach's *I, Daniel Blake* is perhaps the most important film of the year in relation to the situation in a post-Brexit Britain. The fact that it has connected so powerfully with audiences is a tonic for the soul. One of the things that excited me most this year was the rise of independent programming initiatives and the work done by the likes of Wonder Women, Come the Revolution and Club des Femmes, to name but three. The desire to see a diverse range of cinema on our screens would seem to be thriving. 📌



**1 Toni Erdmann** Apart from being a comedy and a very human delight, Maren Ade's film is also an intensely angry political statement about the way that capitalism disempowers, dehumanises and alienates. Jonathan Romney



ARTISTS' MOVING IMAGE

## DEVOTION TO EUPHORIA

Club nostalgist, digital visionary, prophet of transcendence – Birkenhead-born Mark Leckey burns with a hard, gem-like flame

By Nick Pinkerton

Mark Leckey is a great synthesiser, the kind of guide needed to negotiate an atomised culture. In his writing, made to be performed as lectures, he makes sudden, darting lateral movements between seemingly unrelated subjects, while somehow bringing his audience along with him. One of his signature pieces is the multipart installation *UniAddDumThs*, collated collections of art objects and other curios first mounted at the Southbank Centre in 2013 – the title is an abbreviation of 'The Universal Addressability of Dumb Things', a computing concept which refers to a network of everyday objects placed into conversation. The *UniAddDumThs* works, and a great deal more besides, are currently up at 'Containers and Their Drivers', the comprehensive retrospective of Leckey's work at MoMA's PS1 in Queens, New York – the title comes from a Fall lyric, a fact rubbed in by the presence of Mark E. Smith-ian 'Uh's in the wall text.

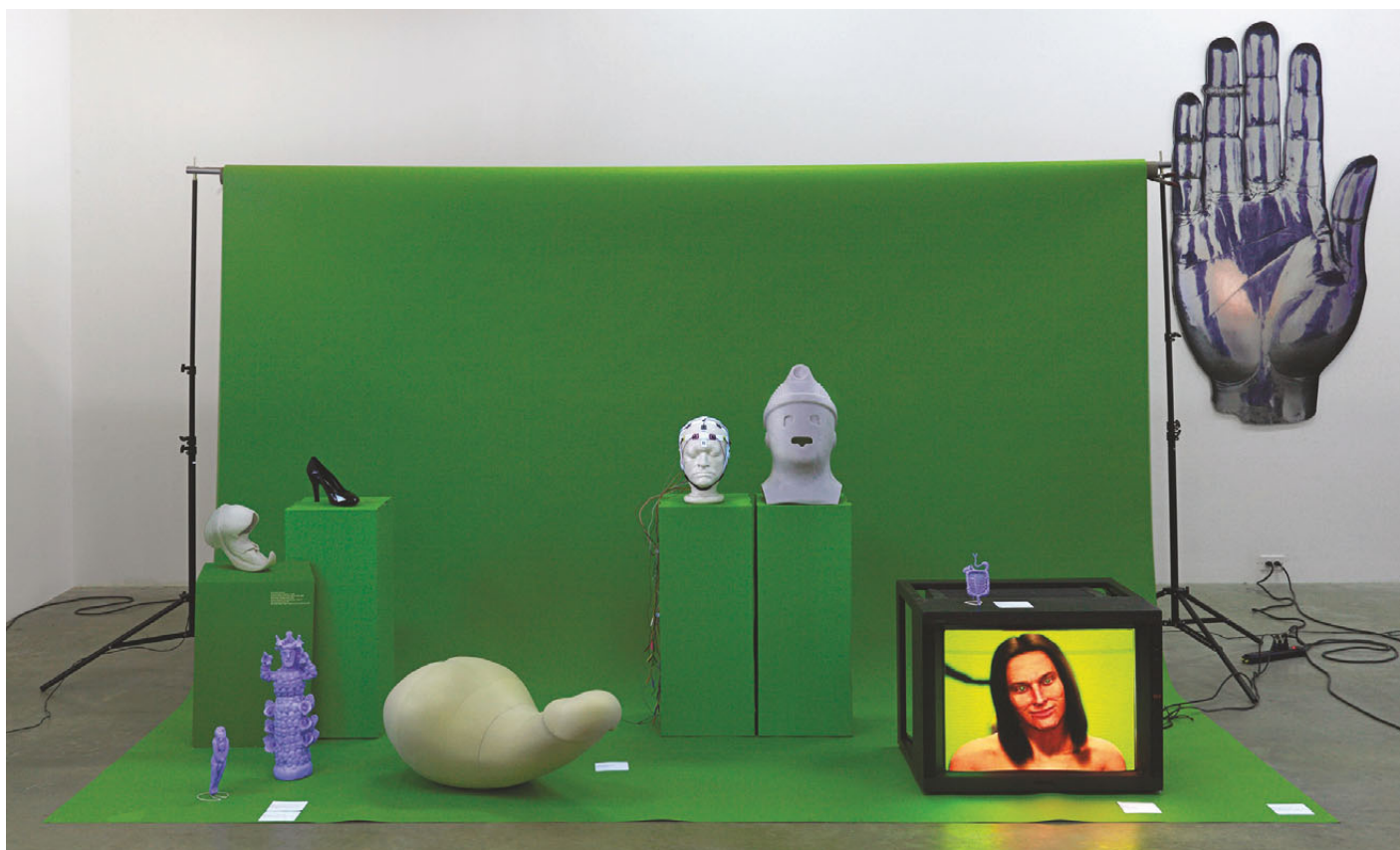
'Containers and Their Drivers' is something like a stroll through Leckey's cluttered headspace,

by turns exhilarating and exhausting. Walking through the warren-like suites of galleries spread over two floors you find certain motifs popping up time and again, though often in quite different forms and formats. There is, to begin with, a great deal of speaker fetishism: one large room is devoted to Leckey's Sound Systems sculptures (2001-12), imposing street party-ready speaker stacks of his own design, while in the gallery where you can view *Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore* (1999), his seminal 15-minute collage film of found footage relating to British club culture, the screen is set between replicas of the Studio 54 speaker cabinets. Among the massed objects making up the *UniAddDumThs* assemblages is Herman Makkink's brazenly phallic kinetic sculpture *Rocking Machine*, which you may remember seeing young Alex use as a deadly weapon in Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) – a film which Leckey can be heard quoting ("It was gorgeousness and gorgeosity made flesh...") in his videotaped lecture *Cinema-in-the-Round* (2006-08), over the image of a re-creation of Jeff Koons's *Rabbit* (1986), which also features in Leckey's *Made in Heaven* (2004), found upstairs running on a loop of 16mm film transferred from video. Leckey's 23-minute found-footage autobiography *Dream English Kid 1964-1999* (2015), playing in still another screening nook, offers a survey of sounds and images culled from (approximately) the years of

his 20th century, from Harold Wilson's "white heat of technology" speech, given the year before Leckey's birth, through footage of a Joy Division matinee which an adolescent Leckey caught at Eric's nightclub, haunted footage of a London squat where he lived in the early 90s, and the total solar eclipse of 11 August 1999. Leaving the small theatre, you re-encounter the eclipse's image on the front page of the *Sun*, blown up and mounted on a lightbox, before passing into a vast gallery bathed in the orange-ish glow of sodium street lights, filled with simulacra of many of the same objects encountered in the film: cardboard electricity pylons, a looming Mylar bubble, all of it in the shadow of a to-scale bridge overpass pasted with Benson & Hedges adverts. And always, everywhere, there is Felix the Cat.

Leckey was born into an upper working-class family in Birkenhead, on the west bank of the Mersey, where he dreamed of the cosmopolitan culture across the way in Liverpool. In his work he returns to and lingers over images of the post-industrial England of his early years, a fertile soil for youth subcultures, be the subculture

*He belongs to the visionary strain in English art, from Mark E. Smith back to Turner and William Blake*



Obscure objects of desire: *UniAddDumThs* (2013), featuring a replica of Herman Makkink's phallic *Rocking Machine*, as seen in *A Clockwork Orange*

IMAGES COURTESY THE ARTIST AND CABINET LONDON



in question that of the fictional droogs, the casuals, northern soul or acid house. *Fiorucci...*, which the artist has described as an “exorcism” for his nostalgia, was produced at the behest of Emma Dexter, a curator at the Institute of Contemporary Arts. Culled from hours of VHS tapes painstakingly procured via snail mail, it is made up of noisy, somewhat ghostly home-video dance-floor footage, often with onscreen timecode, much of it showing kids joined together in Dionysian revel or in solitary blissed-out reverie, manipulated with slow-motion, loop and freeze-frame effects, or rapturous fades to white. The audio element comprises snippets of song, one booming litany of brand names (“Lee, Jordache, Fiorucci, Adidas, Samba...”), and bits of live audio, such as an emcee’s jubilant announcement: “...This is for the Champagne Crew... We do not need anybody... We are independent.” It ends with choppy footage of clouds scudding across the sky at end of day, an image that recalls another nostalgia-prone north-westerner from another generation and the other side of the Mersey, Terence Davies.

When *Fiorucci...* hit the art world, Leckey was in his mid-30s and better known for his dandified sartorial sense than for any body of work he’d managed to produce; nine years later, he was collecting the Turner Prize and a hefty cheque from Nick Cave. But while *Fiorucci...* is evidently the work of a dab-handed editor, a freestanding piece that hardly requires the white box context in order to ‘play’, to date Leckey is better known in gallery and net art circles than in the film world – though he is a former film studies professor at the Städelschule in Frankfurt, and his work is studied with film-historical reference points. In *Cinema-in-the-Round* – the poster for which depicts Kim Novak’s famous spiral up-do from *Vertigo* (1958) – he quotes both Sergei Eisenstein on Walt Disney (“beyond any image, without an image, beyond tangibility – like a pure sensation”) and Jacques Rivette (“The cinema I am after, films which impose themselves on the spectator...”), these highfalutin references accompanied by behind-the-scenes and special-effects process shots from the 2004 Garfield film.

This brings us back to Felix, who plays a crucial role both in *Cinema-in-the-Round* and in *Mark Leckey in The Long Tail*, a freewheeling lecture about our ongoing evolution from a mass market to a dematerialised market, originally given at the Kölnischer Kunstverein in Cologne in 2008, and here visible on a tube television monitor stood in the middle of one of the galleries. Felix is *The Long Tail*’s point of departure – specifically, a photograph taken in the experimental studios of NBC in 1928, where a Felix doll was used to test crude television transmission equipment – and Felix is scattered through PS1 in myriad forms, including a 16mm loop showing the isolated image of his dancing tail suggestively stiffening and softening, and a massive inflatable Felix unceremoniously stuffed into a corner far too small to accommodate him.

In his films, as in his plastic works, Leckey shows every sign of being a packrat. PS1 is chock-a-block with stuff – ephemera related to Leckey’s old art-pop act, donAteller; LP



Artefact unbound: Mark Leckey in *The Long Tail* (2009)

sleeves; posters for his various exhibitions, lectures and films. Even Leckey’s somewhat lapidary vocabulary and footnote-heavy oratory betrays the personality of a collector. (“I am an autodidact,” he told an interviewer in 2008, “that’s why I use bigger words than I should. It’s a classic sign.”) The *UniAddDumThs* installations were conceived as a kind of 21st-century version of the Enlightenment era *Wunderkammern* or cabinets of curiosities, bringing together 3D reproductions of objects that had earlier been collected on Leckey’s hard drive, grouped under the designations ‘Man’, ‘Machine’ and ‘Animal’. In each, one can discover strange congruences between the ancient and the ultramodern (a silver reliquary hand and an i-limb prosthetic), pop and classical culture (a poster for the 2003 Mike Myers film *The Cat in the Hat* over a backdrop of Piero di Cosimo’s 16th-century *The Forest Fire*).

Physically reconstructing a folder’s worth of .jpegs; the transformation of Felix into a broadcast phantom; three-dimensional mock-ups of some of the industrial totems that appear in *Dream English Kid*; a snare drum’s mutation, in Leckey’s three-minute short *Pearl Vision* (2012), into a computer rendering of itself – all of this refers to one of his primary preoccupations, the uneasy relationship between object and representational image, particularly in a post-digitalisation world. “When things start to get digitised, to get dematerialised, space is no longer a concern,” says Leckey in *The Long Tail*: “The artefact – the record, the book – has its information extracted, unbound from

its physical form, and is set free.” In *Cinema-in-the-Round*, he finds the same principle at work in the CGI of James Cameron’s *Titanic* (1997): “[Cameron’s] films are endless explorations of the relationship between man and technology... The theme of the film is based on Karl Marx’s phrase “All that is solid melts into air”. Cameron uses this idea to describe how the manifest materiality of heavy industry at the beginning of the century dissolves into the impalpable intangibility of software processing by its end. Where everything has become an image.”

To move through ‘Containers and Their Drivers’ is to move between a backward-looking attachment to the physical relics of the century now receding and an intense delight at the prospect of soon being raptured up into the digital ether. It’s that being ‘set free’ of *The Long Tail*, which as performed gradually shifts from language that is decorous and academic to that which is rhapsodic, a fervency that has an echo in the dance-floor liberation of *Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore*. Though Leckey took his raps post-Turner Prize, dismissed as another theory-addled egghead, what comes through poignantly at PS1 is his belief in transcendence. He belongs to the visionary strain that is among the richest in English art, from Mark E. Smith to Davies back to Michael Powell and Turner and William Blake. (A lightbox of Blake’s *The Ghost of a Flea* [1819-20] and a wired-up Blake death mask are among the collected relics in *UniAddDumThs*.)

The flip-side of Leckey’s devotion to euphoria is a lingering morning-after melancholy, the palpable sense of loss that one feels watching *Fiorucci...* and *Dream English Kid*. On the back of one of the Sound Systems speaker stacks, one finds a few slogans written in felt-tipped pen, including a snippet from the Victorian art critic Walter Pater: “TO BURN ALWAYS WITH THIS HARD, GEM-LIKE FLAME, TO MAINTAIN THIS ECSTASY, IS SUCCESS IN LIFE.” Hear hear! But the Sound Systems installation itself is a marvellously frustrating contraption, which sends you scuttling between speakers that remain mostly mute, chasing the fugitive soundbites as they come, most often arriving just a bit too late, after the beat has moved on. 📢



*Dream English Kid 1964-1999* (2015)



# POPPING THE BUBBLE

In the movies of Todd Solondz, banal pop music becomes a powerful antidote to delusions of hope and happiness

By Zakia Uddin

"People always end up the way they started out. No one ever changes." So says the suspected paedophile Mark Wiener (Matthew Faber), in Todd Solondz's *Palindromes* (2004). This message runs through the director's films, even as the sugary pop of his soundtracks externalises the characters' fantasies that change is possible. Pop music and the musical arguably form Solondz's aesthetic as much as the airless domestic interiors of the New Jersey homes he explores. Solondz has previously said that he was a failed musician before he was a director. His latest film *Wiener-Dog* (2016) uses music largely for comic effect, most notably when Debussy's 'Clair de Lune' accompanies a tracking shot of the aftermath of a gastro-intestinal episode. But the film also builds on Solondz's career-long preoccupation with music as a portal to fantasy and an expression of a character's innermost desires.

When his characters' private worlds become delusional, the pop music itself becomes unlistenable. The songs, often licensed from commercial music companies specialising in film and television, resemble jingles or the manic music of television advertising. Solondz is also partial to commissioned songs from film composers, such as Jill Wisoff and Eytan Mirsky, who composed title tracks for *Welcome to the Dollhouse* (1995) and *Happiness* (1998), respectively. Solondz himself co-wrote the lyrics to the title song of *Life During Wartime* (2009). Like the other title songs, it marks a turning point in the narrative by earnestly articulating his characters' feelings. Music shows the characters being most themselves: when they are self-aware or in the realm of fantasy. By contrast, dialogue, in this director's work, mostly leads to complications and misunderstanding.

The filmmaker's fascination with pop is evident in his two-minute black-and-white short *Feelings* (1984) and his earliest full-length feature, the now disowned *Fear, Anxiety and Depression* (1989). In *Feelings* Solondz sings Morris Albert's lounge song unaccompanied, over footage of a young man (Solondz again) weeping on a windswept beach before diving into the waves to drown himself. A stocky middle-aged woman – evidently the object of his emotions – appears and runs to save him. The brass kicks in for the easy-listening, vocal-free, mid-tempo back half of the song, as she stumbles and grieves. The segue between the painful and the comic prefigures and encapsulates the uncomfortable tone of Solondz's later work. *Fear, Anxiety and Depression* is a musical within a musical, following the creative and romantic struggles of playwright Ira (Solondz). Two fantastical sequences feature songs written by the director. In one, we see Ira dancing and singing a declaration of love to an unattainable woman, a performance artist called Junk: "You're going to love me/ the rest of your days." While we may never get to see Solondz dancing and



Hope springs: Greta Gerwig as Dawn Wiener in *Wiener-Dog* (2016)

singing again, the film exemplifies the way that music and fantasy intertwine in his films.

Unlike the soundtracks used by US indie directors of the same generation, such as Noah Baumbach or Wes Anderson, Solondz's later scores can rarely be identified with hipster subcultures. This is most apparent in *Dark Horse* (2011), Solondz's slow-burning tale about a mid-thirties underachiever – Abe (Jordan Gelber), still living at home and collecting toy figures – who somehow persuades the depressed Miranda (Selma Blair) to marry him. Much as Solondz's characters seem pathologically unable to spare each other's feelings, the blunt high-energy pop music does not spare us their most deluded projections. Composed by songwriter Michael Kisur, the non-diegetic track repeated throughout the film reflects Abe's obsessive thoughts: "This is the morning/ when you take control/ when your world is in a crazy spin/ Today is the perfect day/ you can be who you want to be." In a video interview, Solondz describes the music as "very adolescent. It's all kind of pop, *American Idol*-like. The happier the music is, the more poignant, the more gut-wrenching his life is." Abe's father's early hopes for his son have stunted the latter – he can neither fulfil them nor envisage an independent life. His dilemma seems to

*When Solondz's characters' private worlds become delusional, the pop music itself becomes unlistenable*

epitomise the critic Lauren Berlant's concept of cruel optimism: "...when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing."

Teen pop music appears to be a recurring influence on Solondz's scores. In his most experimental work *Palindromes* (2004) the central character, teenage Aviva, is played by seven actors of differing ages, races and genders. Having run away after a forced abortion, she finds temporary respite at a foster home where the other young residents – mostly disabled – are members of The Sunshine Singers, a religious singing and dancing troupe. The composers Curtis Moore and Matthew Brookshire were inspired by the 90s boy band NSYNC and contemporary Christian pop.

Brookshire is revealing about the extent to which Solondz shapes the music: "I remember Todd had read an article about 'melisma' and he wanted us to incorporate melismas anywhere we could." Melisma – a single syllable elongated into a series of notes – dominated turn-of-



*Palindromes* (2004)



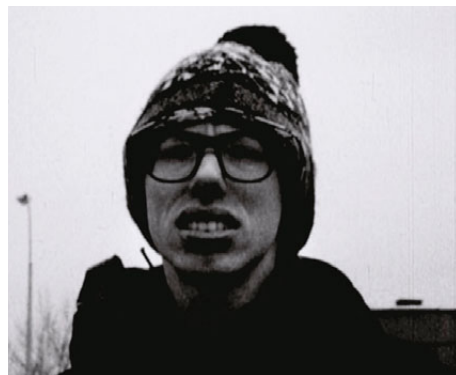
*Welcome to the Dollhouse* (1995)



the-millennium pop, and is now a staple of reality show talent contests because of its high emotionality. Brookshire continues, “Todd was very conscious of the tone. The challenge was to keep the songs earnest, and let any irony happen from the context.” The Sunshine Singers provide a moment of levity, mugging and making boy-band eyes at God. While the songs are funny, their flirtatious performance – the kind usually aimed at teenage girls – also jarringly foregrounds the more brutal sexual manipulation of Aviva by the men she has met. The romantic dreams that boy bands present have been dispelled by her experiences.

In *Wiener-Dog* Solondz uses music as a way of bringing together people who cannot easily articulate their feelings. Dawn Wiener, the tween outsider from *Welcome to the Dollhouse* (1995), is now played as an adult by Greta Gerwig. Her school nickname ‘Wiener-Dog’ is shared by the dachshund who unites the film’s four segments via his attempts to find a home with one dysfunctional owner after the other. Dawn – who has earlier rescued the dog from the veterinary table where she was due to be euthanised – picks up a hitch-hiking mariachi troupe while on a road trip with former school bully Brandon (Kieran Culkin). The Mexican musicians describe the US as “so lonely” and a “big fat elephant drowning in a sea of despair”, and play a melancholy song in the motel room Wiener shares with Brandon. He shoots up in the bathroom while Wiener stares ahead, numbed to the situation.

The mariachi band’s sweeping view of American life is narrowly reflected in the angst of Solondz’s suburban characters; there is nothing more American than a lonely motel room. The sequence may be real or fantastical – the way that no one is looking at anyone else and the band’s gaze is directed away from the tawdry scene, suggest that it might be a dream interlude. Whose dream is unclear, but the song unites all of the characters in their loneliness. The segment ends with Dawn and Brandon getting together romantically, holding hands briefly and silently as they drive back: an unusually sweet ending for Dawn (whose seemingly inevitable suicide began *Palindromes*). In *Wiener-Dog*, Solondz tentatively undercuts the fatalistic worldview that has coloured his work from the beginning, and has so often been reaffirmed by his ironic use of pop music. Here, for once, he uses music to point to the possibility of shared experience and change. ☺



Todd Solondz in *Feelings* (1984)

## PRIMAL SCREEN THE WORLD OF SILENT CINEMA

After decades of neglect, a documentary has brought a silent cinema heroine in from the wilderness



**By Pamela Hutchinson**

Nell Shipman, silent-era actress, writer, producer and director, gives new meaning to the phrase ‘film pioneer’. At the height of her career, this adventurous soul starred in a series of outdoorsy action films featuring a menagerie of animals and seriously risky stuntwork – when she nearly drowned shooting a scene in a river, it didn’t occur to her to complain: instead she said, “I should have paid Vitagraph for the adventure.” Furthermore, she worked entirely outside the system, running her own production company and filming her “little dramas in big places” deep in the hills of Idaho, more than 1,000 miles north of Los Angeles. But isolation from Hollywood has contributed to a neglect of her legacy – she was missing from the first histories of the film industry, and remains little known. Karen Day’s documentary *Girl from God’s Country* aims to rectify that, not only telling Shipman’s story, but examining how her and her female peers’ histories have been erased and the impact that has had on the modern industry and on generations of female filmgoers.

Canadian-born Shipman was a thrill-seeker through and through, who “refused to be a lady” and ditched school early to go into rep, becoming what she called a “vagabond actress”. She wrote her first novel soon after marriage and the birth of her first child, then moved into screenwriting. When a star failed to turn up on set one day, Shipman stepped in, starting her career as a screen actress. Her breakthrough role was in Vitagraph’s *God’s Country and the Woman* (1916), an adaptation of a novel by James Oliver Curwood, bestselling American author of wilderness adventures – the first in a series of ‘God’s Country’ films.

In 1918 she survived a bout of Spanish flu; following her recuperation, she co-founded a production company and, leaving her husband behind, headed to Canada to make one of her most famous films, *Back to God’s Country* (1919). She adapted the film from another Curwood novel, sidelining the original protagonist, a Great Dane, and focusing on a woman who she herself played. A big box-office success – Canada’s best-performing silent movie – the film is notable for Shipman’s naked bathing scene, one of the earliest examples of nudity in mainstream cinema. A trade-press ad cautioned: “Don’t book *Back to God’s Country* unless you want to prove the Nude is NOT Rude.”

Having established her writing and acting skills, in 1921 Shipman turned down a contract from Sam Goldwyn and went north with her film crew and around 70 animals. Shipman believed that “grand movies demand grand landscapes,” and in

*Shipman’s films are spectacular, but nothing steals the scene from her jarringly modern heroines*



Woman with a movie camera: Nell Shipman

Priest Lake, Idaho, she had found “the loveliest, wildest, most perfect place on earth”.

Running a new outfit called Nell Shipman Productions, co-directing (with her new partner Bert Van Tuyle), writing and acting, she returned to the wilderness themes that suited her, playing an action heroine roaming the rugged landscape. Animals featured prominently. Shipman cared deeply for her furry co-stars, and she knew their value: “They are all scene-stealers and we give them full stage, which will earn us a million hearts on screen.”

She was right about the animals, and the rocky landscapes too. Shipman’s films are still spectacular. Those mountains and bears can be picturesque, cute or terrifying. But nothing steals the scene from Shipman’s jarringly modern heroines – beautiful, audacious girls with guns who have the nerve to face down male antagonists and the guts to thrive in a hostile environment; but they are also romantic women who have a natural empathy with living creatures.

The features Shipman’s new company shot included the gold-prospecting drama *The Grub Stake* (1923) and *The Girl from God’s Country* (1921), in which she played twins and got stuck into some hearty fight scenes. The work was dangerous – Shipman did her own stunts and again nearly drowned when she fell through the surface of a frozen lake. On one remote shoot, she and Van Tuyle were stranded in a snowstorm for two days; another time, her beloved dog was poisoned by disgruntled locals.

Doing business was never easy either. After shooting and editing her films, Shipman had to lug the reels around the New York offices of independent film distributors to get them shown – and see a return on her investment. The distributor she found for *The Grub Stake* went bankrupt shortly afterward, meaning the film was never released. In 1924, Nell Shipman Productions followed suit. She and Van Tuyle separated and the animals were sold to a zoo.

In Day’s documentary Shipman emerges as a fearless filmmaker who exemplifies the pioneering spirit of early cinema. Many of her descendants have followed her into the business, and her exploits are rightly celebrated in her family. Her story deserves to be shared more widely, so that the Shipman spirit can inspire future generations of filmmakers. ☺



# EMBRACE THE APOCALYPSE



Non sequiturs and dead ends: Hong Sangsoo's *Yourself and Yours* (2016)

A resistance to fashion, glitz and compromise make Vienna one of the most rewarding stops on the festival circuit

## By Giovanni Marchini Camia

Under the guidance of its outspoken and idealistic artistic director Hans Hurch, at the helm since 1997, the Viennale offers a showcase for cinema singularly short of populist and commercial compromise – the closest approximation to which on this year's programme was a tribute to Christopher Walken, who didn't attend. With no red carpet to fill or A-list status to defend, the festival can concentrate on careful curation: the result is a selection of films refreshingly free of hierarchy, chronology or geographical bias. Feature-length highlights of the year's prestigious festivals are screened alongside avant-garde shorts, renovated masterpieces by canonical directors and little-known items of film-historical significance, and the commitment across the board to celluloid projection is exemplary.

So while Vienna passed almost entirely on the last Berlinale's disappointing programme, it did pick up Ted Fendt's micro-budget feature debut *Short Stay*, which had an under-the-radar premiere in Berlin's Forum section, screening it in 35mm. With its milieu of directionless twenty-somethings (played by the director's friends), its awkwardly deadpan humour and unassuming aesthetic, *Short Stay* has a superficial resemblance to early mumblecore – see, for example, Andrew Bujalski's *Funny Ha Ha* (2002)

– but is elevated by Fendt's subtle, sophisticated script and affectionate, winsome depiction of the rhythms and textures of suburban Philadelphia.

Fendt's film has been compared favourably to the work of the Korean director Hong Sangsoo; the Viennale offered the chance to check the correspondence with a screening of Hong's *Yourself and Yours* (2016). Both directors excel at orchestrating comically charged social dynamics in low-key environments, and they share a knack for narrative non sequiturs and dead ends. Mike, the protagonist of *Short Stay*, at one point tries to apologise to an acquaintance for an unspecified offence and gets harshly rebuffed. The absurdity – given Mike's exceeding meekness – is only magnified by the lack of explanation or resolution, and the other character is written out of the film as quickly as he was introduced. Similarly, in *Yourself and Yours*, when the heartbroken Youngsoo tries in vain to be let into his ex-girlfriend Minjung's house, he's greeted by another woman walking up the road. The camera pans right to frame her as she cheerfully calls his name, then pans back to Youngsoo as he keeps ringing the doorbell. The woman never appears again; it's unclear whether she even existed.

This incident is one of many mysteries in what is arguably the Korean auteur's most confounding work. The story begins with the central couple's break-up after Youngsoo berates Minjung on the basis of a rumour. The scene is shocking in its viciousness, especially because, for once in a Hong film, the outburst is not triggered or cushioned by severe inebriation. Thereafter, Youngsoo falls into despair, whereas Minjung quickly moves on, starting short-term

flirtations with two men. Although both suitors are convinced they recognise her from a past encounter, she insists they've never met, and claims to be Minjung's identical twin sister. Neither denying nor confirming this, but giving plenty of contradictory indications, Hong casts doubt on the reality of the entire narrative, which may represent a sort of emotional comeuppance for the tormented Youngsoo. As one character helpfully advises, "Don't try to know everything" – this seems to be a guideline both for viewers trying to decipher and rationalise the film, and for domineering (heterosexual) men bent on doing the same with women.

The Viennale's historical retrospective, hosted by the Austrian Film Museum and titled 'A Second Life', probed the definition and possibilities of the remake. The selection, parcelled into double- and triple-bills, included three vastly different adaptations of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (William Wyler's from 1939, Luis Buñuel's from 1954 and Jacques Rivette's from 1985) and both Alan Clarke's and Gus Van Sant's *Elephant* (1988 and 2003, respectively). Perhaps the strongest double-bill, however, was to be found in the festival's shorts programme, with the twinned screening of the earliest and latest films of the American experimental filmmaker Ken Jacobs – *Orchard Street* (1955) and *Reichstag 9/11* (2016). *Orchard Street* – originally released in a truncated 12-minute version and restored last year to its original length of 27 minutes – silently depicts a bustling street market in Lower Manhattan. Although on its own it pales compared with the astounding filmography Jacobs built up over the following decades, *Orchard Street* nevertheless



offers a gorgeously shot and, in retrospect, nostalgic capsule of a vanished era. Screened back-to-back with *Reichstag 9/11*, it gains new effectiveness, reinforcing the later film's already staggering impact. When Jacobs's warm, orange-toned 16mm images – market stands overflowing with products of every type, shape and colour; buyers and sellers engaged in lively interactions that exude a jovial sense of community – are replaced by the hideous digital apocalypse of *Reichstag 9/11*, nostalgia instantly gives way to acute horror in the face of the present.

This most recent film is composed from civilian video recordings of the World Trade Center attacks, which Jacobs sourced from the internet and manipulated extensively. The distortion is often so extreme that the image can barely be made out as it dissolves into a ghastly mess of pixels and acid colours. Most of the clips are only allowed to run long enough for us to vaguely recognise their content before they're frozen in 'eternalisms' – Jacobs's patented method of rapidly alternating between similar but colour-inverted frames to produce a stereoscopic flicker effect that creates the illusion of infinite, transfixed motion. Through these tactics, Jacobs pulls off the remarkable feat of re-injecting the images with the terrifying power they lost through endless rebroadcast in the long wake of the attacks. At the same time, the impossible motion of his eternalisms speaks volumes about the impossibility of grasping the enormity of the event.

The double-bill underlined the transformation of a city – some of the videos could well have been shot from Orchard Street; but because New York City's myriad filmic representations have engendered a sense of familiarity and belonging in people the world over, and because 9/11 is the most momentous world event of the post-Cold War era, the shocking disparity between Jacobs's two films resonates globally. From our present vantage, knowing all that's happened in the 15 years since the attacks – I am writing only a few hours after Donald Trump was elected US president – it's distressingly difficult to dismiss the equivalence Jacobs provocatively proposes between 9/11 and the Reichstag Fire of 1933.

A more comforting view of the world could be found in the tribute to the American filmmaker Peter Hutton – the absolute highlight of this year's festival. Hutton, who died in June at the age of 71, didn't enjoy the same level of recognition as some of his avant-garde contemporaries. The Viennale's 20-film retrospective, all but one projected



The young and the restless: Ted Fendt's *Short Stay*

in 16mm, proved for many a most welcome introduction to the work of this incredible artist.

In interviews, Hutton argued that his films eschewed grand concepts, seeking instead to renew one's interest in looking at the supposedly mundane by distilling the spiritual from the material. This quality is most evident in early diaristic films such as *July '71 in San Francisco*, *Living at Beach Street*, *Working at Canyon Cinema*, *Swimming in the Valley of the Moon* (1971), which he shot while living in a Bay Area commune as a student; or in the sublime *Images of Asian Music (A Diary from Life 1973-74)* (1974), which documents his travels in south-east Asia as a merchant mariner – a profession Hutton took up time and again and which deeply influenced his meditative style of filmmaking. Silent, black and white, these films evince an astonishing eye for framing and the textural potentialities of natural light, drawing immense pleasure from all that glows, glimmers, ripples and billows. With his Bolex, Hutton was capable of provoking intense wonderment through something as simple as a static shot of a shirt gently swaying as it hangs to dry in the sun, or dust particles dancing in a shaft of light piercing a dark room. The shots in his films are not usually edited together to form a narrative; instead, separated by slow

fades and a few frames of black leader, they float by like shining memories fondly recalled.

Weightier concepts did inform Hutton's later films – particularly the last two, *At Sea* (2007) and *Three Landscapes* (2013), which reflect on the nature of labour, production and commerce in the globalised present. In these films, Hutton employed an aesthetic radically different to his early work, shooting mostly in colour (something he had avoided after his first and least remarkable film, *In Marin County*, 1969, until *Time and Tide* in 2000) and from extreme distances to create epic compositions of industrial and agricultural production sites. The expanded palette, scale and thematic scope didn't at all diminish his proficiency nor alter his philosophy.

*At Sea*, which in three chapters charts the life of a cargo ship from construction to dismantlement, inspires awe at the beauty and monumentality of nature, and the human enterprise taking place within it. Though in the first chapter humans are tiny ants within the colossal shipyard, in the finale they regain prominence as they break down ships with ropes and hammers on a beach strewn with pieces of defunct freighters, appearing like the survivors of a cataclysm, taking apart the gargantuan ruins of civilisation. The film's final shot, in black and white, shows a group of smiling, laughing men fascinated by Hutton's camera. Following Armageddon, Hutton seems to imply, man will return to appreciate the simpler pleasures in life. Considering Jacobs's and Hutton's combined view of the present, perhaps we should embrace the apocalypse after all. 🌀

*Hutton could provoke intense wonderment through something as simple as a static shot of a shirt hanging to dry in the sun*



Spirit guide: (from left) Peter Hutton's *At Sea* (2007), *July '71 in San Francisco...* (1971) and *Three Landscapes* (2013)





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MATHIEU  
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DE MEDEIROS

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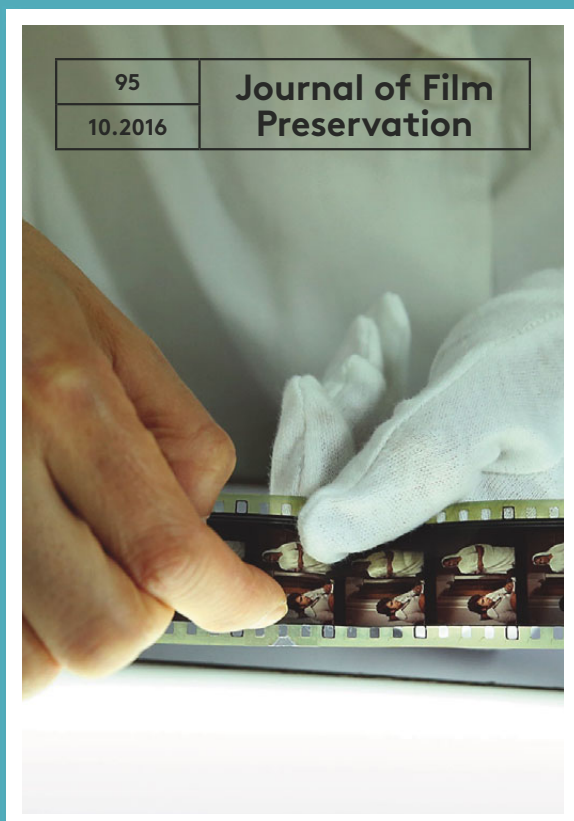
THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

IN CINEMAS & ON MUBI **DECEMBER**

CAST: JULIA DE GASQUET, CHRISTELLE PROT, ADRIEN MICHAUX, JACQUES BONNAFFÉ, CLAIRE LEFILLIÈRE, VINCENT DUMESTRE, LOUISE MOATY, FRANCINE, DIDIER JACOB  
CO-DIRECTOR: LUC AND JEAN-PIERRE DARDENNE, EUGÈNE GREEN, EDITOR: RAPHAEL O'BYRNE, BENOIT DE CLERCK, PAUL ROUSCHOP, AGNÈS NODEN, VICTOIRE GOUNOD  
COSTUME DESIGNER: CATHERINE GROSSEN, MAKEUP: SARAH MOREL, HAIR: VALÉRIE LOISELEUX, PRODUCTION DESIGNER: STÉPHANE THIÉBAUT, EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: DELPHINE TOMSON, PHILIPPE LOGIE  
PRODUCED BY SYLVAIN MARQUET, WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF THE CENTRE NATIONAL DU CINÉMA ET DE L'IMAGE ANIMÉE AND THE SUPPORT OF REGION ÎLE-DE-FRANCE, IN ASSOCIATION WITH CNC, OF THE TAX SHELTER FROM THE BELGIUM FEDERAL GOVERNMENT CASA KAFKA PICTURES, CASA KAFKA PICTURES EMPOWERED BY BELFUS, IN ASSOCIATION WITH ARTE/COFINOVA 12, CO-PRODUCED WITH VOO AND BE TV  
PRODUCED BY COFFEE AND FILMS, LES FILMS DU FLEUVE, FILM FACTORY, TSP, EN HAUT DES MARCHES



MUBI



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the world's film heritage since 1938



# Reviews



## 86 **Life, Animated**

*Since its prizewinning Sundance premiere this film has been widely characterised as feelgood, but its subject's trajectory is by no means one of uninterrupted progress – his Disneyfied worldview is shown to have considerable limitations*



**64 Films of the Month**



**70 Films**



**96 Home Cinema**



**106 Books**





Last action hero: Private Billy Lynn (Joe Alwyn) is fêted at the Dallas Cowboys stadium for his bravery in combat during the Iraq invasion in 2004

## Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk

USA/United Kingdom/People's Republic of China 2016, Director: Ang Lee

### Reviewed by Graham Fuller

"Haji don't surf!" quips Sergeant David Dime of Bravo Squad during a victory-tour photo op with cheerleaders at the Dallas Cowboys stadium in *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk*. Dime's appropriation of "Charlie don't surf!" from *Apocalypse Now* (1979) confirms that Ang Lee's putative classic is a topsy-turvy version of Francis Ford Coppola's Vietnam War film. Transposing Specialist Billy Lynn's war from Iraq to down-home Texas, Lee – consciously or not – parallels Billy with *Apocalypse Now*'s aghast Willard, Dime with Kilgore, Cowboys owner Norm Oglesby with Kurtz, the cheerleaders with the Playboy Bunnies and the stadium's fireworks display with the night fight at the Do Lung Bridge. When Billy, standing behind Destiny's Child, sees a wave of fake fire surge across his field of vision, you expect him to say, "I love the smell of Beyoncé in the evening."

Based on Ben Fountain's 2012 multi-award-winning novel, the film is set over one day in the life of Bravo Squad: after film of a firefight in Iraq has gone viral and made

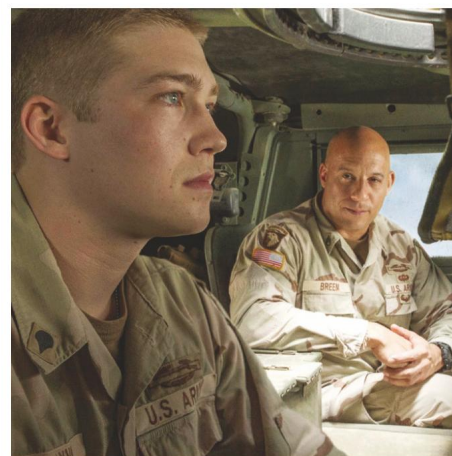
them national heroes, they have been sent on a two-week tour, of which the appearance at the Cowboys' stadium is the culmination. But for Billy and his comrades, at least, this is far from the triumphant event intended.

Critical consensus in the US has been that *Billy Lynn* is an honourable failure. The negative reviews were predicated on the visual aesthetic of the initial release version, which was projected at 120fps, as photographed by John Toll, in 3D and 4K. The focus on the look of Lee's daring experiment unfortunately detracted from its considerable achievement as an emotionally exacting drama about the disconnect between the dehumanising effects of war and the ruthless distortion and trivialisation of military heroics by the media and entertainment industries.

At the time of writing, *Billy Lynn* could still prove a hit despite the critical naysaying – in a year in which popular will has seemed bent on defying conventional wisdom, it would hardly count as a surprise. Released in its 'immersive' format in one venue in New York and another in Los Angeles on Veterans Day, three days after the unexpected election of a potentially hawkish president, Lee's *cri de coeur* on behalf of brutalised soldiery became the year's third-biggest opener. Early audiences might have been attracted by the thought of a new kind of spectacle, of course, and it was possible the box

office would flatten out when *Billy Lynn* was released in the conventional 24fps format the following weekend. Even so, the hurry to dismiss it as one of Lee's lesser works was ill judged.

The success or failure of a technological innovation in film cannot be divorced from the vehicles chosen for it. Peter Jackson's modelling of the *Hobbit* films on high-definition videogames for adolescents raised on PlayStations and Xboxes justified his filming it at 48fps, though that crudely distended triptych made



Joe Alwyn as Billy Lynn and Vin Diesel as Shroom





*The film's ultra-pristineness, akin to the clarity experienced during the self-aware phase of a psychedelic high, is both arresting and disorienting*

moment with Billy compassionately explains why he is alienated by the stadium ordeal.

In 3D, the accelerated frame rate has the effect of making characters in focus pop out from their backgrounds alarmingly. Except for when Toll uses rack-focusing during conversation scenes – which badly blurs the non-speaker, breaking the illusion – the film's ultra-pristineness, akin to the clarity experienced during the self-aware phase of drunkenness or a psychedelic high, is simultaneously arresting and disorienting. It confers on the *mise en scène* a near-virtualness that literalist critics have rushed to disparage, ignoring the way it functions as a Brechtian distancing device. The calculated aura of unreality emphasises the film's caustic putdowns of capitalism's self-serving co-opting of Bravo Squad's harrowing recent ordeals – especially the slaying of the gentle Buddhist warrior Shroom – as generic heroism, in the reflected glory of which all the right-thinking American non-combatants at the stadium can bask.

Paradoxically, the non-'immersive' version of the film most moviegoers will see is more powerful. Given that Lee and Toll must have conceived every shot with focal relief in mind, the more muted 24fps/2D and non-3D *Billy Lynn* benefits from cinematography so crystalline it gives an impression of three-dimensionality. This is especially true of the scenes in which Billy and his comrades are seen sitting in the stadium or greeting the public, which show how completely army life and Iraq have divorced them from their social origins. Juxtaposed with working-class football fans, they seem like visitors from another planet.

Matching this visual Brechtianism is the heightened dialogue by the screenwriter, long-time Lee associate Jean-Christophe Castelli. When Billy's family members greet him on

his return home, his mother and oldest sister speak to him tentatively in movie clichés that maintain a barrier between them – as a war hero he has become foreign to them. His stroke-victim father, evidently an Iraq War supporter, stares at Billy not with pride but with mute rage. His inability to communicate with him augurs the fury with which the jealous roadies and stadium ground staff attack Bravo Squad towards the end. Only Billy's other sister Kathryn – physically scarred and thus morally simpatico – offers him solace. The film's liberal conscience and, thanks to Kristen Stewart's unerringly naturalistic performance, its pivotal figure, she struggles to prevent Billy going back to Iraq; but, indoctrinated by Dime and the fact of Shroom's death, he now feels safe and purposeful only among his buddies. Her campaign is as forlorn as Alma's desire to keep Jack from his two-man enclave in Lee's *Brokeback Mountain* (2005).

Castelli's finest moment comes at the stadium when Dime sardonically tells the glad-handing good ol' boy fracker Wayne, "You keep on drilling and we'll keep on killing." The point made by Dime, a disciplinarian fiercely protective of his boys, is that no one in the stadium is capable of relating to them without patronising or exploiting them, exactly the default mode of Wayne and the Cowboys' oily owner Norm Oglesby (a riveting study in phony patriotism by Steve Martin). Billy and the cheerleader Faison's parting is another key scene in which exaggerated focal work and heightened dialogue combine to stress ominous political undertones. Mulling over whether to leave the army at Kathryn's request or be redeployed in Iraq, Billy is rudely awakened from his and Faison's romantic dream by the realisation that she only cares for him because he is the hero of the hour and that her feelings would evaporate were he to leave the army. Earlier, virgin Billy's cheerfully cynical best friend Montoya had warned him to "close the deal" before Faison went off with a linebacker, a plausible estimate of what will likely happen once the memory of their brief dalliance had faded. Their doomed relationship echoes the divorce Willard talks about in *Apocalypse Now* and it's little wonder that, like Willard, Billy yearns to get back to the war. **S**

for an atrocious prequel to Jackson's grave and beautiful *The Lord of the Rings*; the 48 format has lain fallow since. Having animated cinema's most tactile 3D tiger in *Life of Pi* (2012) and reinvented himself as a hi-tech storyteller, Lee decided to shoot *Billy Lynn* at 60fps/2K after he'd read Fountain's novel. The adjustment to 120fps/4K occurred during production.

The goal was to sharpen the viewer's perception of events as keenly as possible to facilitate identification with Billy's emotional and sensual responses to his Iraq experiences – patrolling a market where kids selling *Finding Nemo* bootlegs could pose a threat, scoping out a multi-family dwelling where every male could be an insurgent, sitting on the chest of an enemy whose throat he has slit – and to those back home, where nothing makes sense any more. A contradiction shapes the film: singled out by Dime (the excellent Garrett Hedlund suggesting a cross between Steve McQueen and the young Tommy Lee Jones) as the unit's most dependable member, Billy coasts on the adrenaline rush of combat duty in 'the sandbox', but – lost in a PTSD daze and grieving for his sergeant/surrogate father Shroom – he is a rabbit in the spotlight of the insulting extravaganza in the stadium. In keeping with this ironic fish-out-of-water scenario, it is Bravo Squad's brash tour manager Albert, a car salesman of a movie producer, who in a private

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Marc Platt  
Ang Lee  
Rhodri Thomas  
Stephen Cornwell  
**Screenplay**  
Jean-Christophe Castelli  
based on the novel by Ben Fountain  
**Director of Photography**  
John Toll  
**Editor**  
Tim Squyres

**Production Designer**  
Mark Friedberg  
**Music**  
Mychael Danna  
Jeff Danna  
**Production Mixer**  
Drew Kunin  
**Costume Designer**  
Joseph G. Aulisi  
  
©Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc. and LSC Film Corporation  
**Production Companies**

TriStar Pictures presents with Studio 8 in association with LStar Capital, Film4, Bona Film Group an Ink Factory/Marc Platt production An Ang Lee film  
**Executive Producer**  
Brian Bell  
Jeff Robinov  
Guo Guangchang  
Ben Waisbren

**Cast**  
**Joe Alwyn**  
Private Billy Lynn  
**Kristen Stewart**  
Kathryn Lynn  
**Chris Tucker**  
Albert Ratner  
**Garrett Hedlund**  
Sergeant David Dime  
**Makenzie Leigh**  
Faison  
**Vin Diesel**  
Shroom  
**Steve Martin**

Norm Oglesby  
**Brian 'Astro' Bradley**  
Lodis  
**Arturo Castro**  
Mango  
**Ismael Cruz Cordova**  
Holliday  
**Barney Harris**  
Sykes  
**Beau Knapp**  
Crack  
**Mason Lee**  
Foo  
**Ben Platt**  
Josh

**Dolby Atmos In Colour [L8:51]**  
  
**Distributor**  
Sony Pictures Releasing UK

**The Iraq War, 2004. During a firefight between the US Army's Bravo Squad and Iraqi insurgents at Al-Ansakar Canal, a cellphone video camera records 19-year-old Specialist Billy Lynn rushing to help his stricken sergeant Shroom and shooting one of his assailants. The video has made Billy a national hero.**

Sometime later, Billy and the other Bravo Squad survivors, led by Sergeant Dime, are nearing the end of a two-week victory tour at home. They are to appear at the Dallas Cowboys stadium in the Thanksgiving Day half-time show starring Destiny's Child. During the event, Billy recalls Shroom's funeral and visiting

his own family in rural Texas. He remembers his sister Kathryn imploring him to get an honourable discharge. At the stadium, Bravo Squad meet members of the public and Cowboys owner Norm Oglesby. Billy makes out with cheerleader Faison. Some of the roadies scuffle with Bravo Squad.

The show goes ahead. Billy's mind flashes back to conversations with Shroom and Dime, the moment he stabbed and killed an Iraqi, and Shroom's death. He and Faison plan to reunite. The soldiers and the roadies brawl. Kathryn drives up to ask Billy if he is staying. He tells her he is returning to Iraq.



## I Am Not a Serial Killer

Ireland/United Kingdom/USA 2016

Director: Billy O'Brien

Certificate 15 103m 10s

### Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

You know you're dealing with an unusual sort of protagonist when his mum won't let him work in the family funeral parlour because he's too obsessed with true-crime carnage already, and she fears it would unbalance the teenager's precarious mental state. The title of this adaptation of the first in a series of young-adult novels by Dan Wells sounds gimmicky but is actually to be taken seriously.

Protestations of innocence notwithstanding, Max Records's central character, John Wayne Cleaver, actually does tick quite a few worrying sociopathic boxes: he finds forming or even understanding emotional connections something of a puzzle, and has to learn to suppress his latent aggressive tendencies. Records, who starred in Spike Jonze's *Where the Wild Things Are* (2009), has an unusual screen presence and proves perfect in the role, for although he looks permanently startled, as if struggling to process what's going on, that wide-eyed expression leaves us wondering about the state of his connection with the world. Records manages all of this with such a precise degree of expressive calibration that, as events unfold, he makes even the tiniest moments of emotional resonance tell. Nominally, this is a horror movie, yet its underlying trajectory traces the psychologically malformed central character's ability to understand and perhaps even feel love – adopting the classic genre device of placing the monster at the emotional heart of the story. Not to give too much away, but here it's the real killer, displaying both a psychotic and a caring side, who's a key influence on the protagonist's tentative maturation towards a more connected sense of self.

This journey starts, perhaps with playful irony, in John's ongoing fascination with the methods of various notorious serial killers – background knowledge that gives him an advantage over the bumbling local cops when sundry bizarre, even animalistic slayings cause terror on the streets of his sleepy Minnesota community and bring a stream of intriguingly ravaged cadavers to his family's mortuary. While the identity of the perpetrator is fairly easily uncovered, Irish screenwriter and director Billy O'Brien's film has myriad other interesting aspects, not least that the teenage sleuth's pursuit follows a morally ambiguous path, pointing up shades of David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* (1986) as the escalating discoveries possibly chime with his own lurking inner urges. Indeed, having begun to surmise the shocking secret behind the removal of human organs and the mysterious tarry substance deposited by the corpses, John continues surveillance out of his own morbid curiosity, choosing not to get the authorities involved, even though it means extending the trail of victims. His plan to menace the killer's loved one, as an underhand means of letting the latter know he's on to him, results in a truly uncomfortable sequence, since it has us powerlessly observing the troubled protagonist teetering dangerously on the brink, almost letting his own violent potential spiral out of control.

Part of what makes this moment so unsettling is the sense of violation of a dowdy, chintzy, dimly



The killer inside me: Max Records as John Wayne Cleaver, with Laura Fraser as his mother April

lit suburban bedroom – O'Brien's vivid rendering of place is a strength throughout the film. His 2005 debut feature *Isolation* showed a masterly hand at clammy atmospherics, getting the absolute most out of a slurry-sloshed Irish farm setting in which a failed biological experiment unleashed creature-feature consequences. In the new film – again working with ace cameraman Robbie Ryan, whose star has been in the ascendant in the meantime – there's a claggy, damp-infused bleakness to the overall fresco of wintry Minnesota backstreets, engulfing gloomy nights and the icky interior palette at the funeral parlour.

The use of 16mm stock brings a vintage feel to the abiding unease, underlining a

*Nominally, this is a horror movie, yet it traces the psychologically malformed central character's ability to understand and perhaps even feel love*

thematic and visual kinship with, say, George A. Romero's anxiety-racked youthful vampire chronicle *Martin* (1979), yet also, in its pervasive gloom and queasy colour choices, recalling the unlovely world of Krzysztof Kieslowski's Polish period. The impact is further intensified because it's powered along by the keyboard patterns of Adrian Johnston's tremendous score, whose dominating church organ – tied into the story because the instrument provides accompaniment in the family's funeral services – brings to mind both the hypnotic repetitions of early John Carpenter and the labyrinthine baroque of *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961).

Such reference points, though surely among the film's grown-up pleasures for those attuned to them, might seem rather distant from the context of popular YA fiction that spawned the material in the first place. For many potential viewers, small-screen signposts such as *Dexter* (2006-13) or *Six Feet Under* (2001-05) might be more realistic and helpful, yet there's no sense in which O'Brien's deliberate and refined handling, framed by a seemingly rather European sensibility, is



Neighbourhood watch: Christopher Lloyd as Mr Crowley





**Pierrot le fou:** Records's Cleaver finds forming or even understanding emotional connections a puzzle, and has to learn to repress his aggressive tendencies

misplaced. It's not as if he's somehow come in and put an artsy veneer on populist fare, not least because author Wells is in no mind at all to talk down to his young readers. Instead, John's trials in bonding with his family and sustaining friendships, all the while fretting that he himself is the worst kind of psychological freak, stands throughout as an intelligent and justifiable heightening of universal adolescent concerns. What's more, Wells also finds a graceful entry point to the heart of the issue by having the story's sometimes kindly, sometimes creepy elderly neighbour quote William Blake's poem 'The Tyger'. Christopher Lloyd's character does in turn have his own particular motives in posing the question, "Did he who made the Lamb make thee?" But it's also a question that resonates with Records's nervy young lad, as he too ponders his own "fearful symmetry". Perhaps he's not so alone in pursuing this line of thought after all...

Throughout all this there's a seriousness to O'Brien's film which is heartening simply because it implores us to take master Cleaver's plight seriously, delivering an unusual and involving character study, with horror and whodunnit elements. It's certainly not as graphic or upfront as a film with 'Serial Killer' in the title might lead one to expect, but for much of the running time the visuals' chilly and pensive cast helps to sustain an immersive intrigue. There is, though, a third-act reveal that will probably prove contentious with those unaware of the original novel, since it seems to break with the story's dark psychological veracity and move into a more fantastical register. For the first time the execution slightly falters, since this new layer of invention doubtless necessitated a more generous effects budget than O'Brien's Irish-UK production could muster, leaving

us with a climactic standoff that's somewhat underpowered following such a strong build-up.

However, this final act is undeniably thematically coherent with what's gone before, emphasising that it's not the superficial action highlights but the underlying emotional through-line that's the real clincher here – allowing us a surprising degree of empathy and insight into the mind of a potential sociopath wanting to understand and maybe even experience love like the rest of us. It also sets a platform for remarkable

performances from Records and Lloyd – the latter given his best role in years as the neighbour, a telling and contradictory portrait of old age that's so much more valuable than the raving comic loon Lloyd has too often been asked to play in the past. Meanwhile O'Brien's admirably controlled direction works up a rising sense of dread from the power of its restraint – managing for as long as possible to keep its horrors tantalisingly in long shot. In sum, a truly superior genre offering from a filmmaker of genuine class and ambition. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Nick Ryan  
James Harris  
Mark Lane

#### Written by

Billy O'Brien  
Christopher Hyde  
Adapted from the  
book by Dan Wells

#### Director of

Photography  
Robbie Ryan

#### Editor

Nick Emerson  
Production Designer  
Jennifer Klide

#### Music

Adrian Johnston  
Sound Designer  
Aza Hand

#### Costume Designer

Deborah Fiscus

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Tea Shop and Film  
Company Limited

#### Production

Companies  
Bord Scannán na  
hÉireann/The Irish  
Film Board presents

in association with  
Quickfire Films, The  
Fyzz Facility Limited,  
Fantastic Films and  
Winterland Pictures  
a Floodland Pictures  
and The Tea Shop  
& Film Company  
production  
Developed with the  
assistance of Screen  
Projex, Bord Scannán  
na hÉireann/The  
Irish Film Board  
Executive Producers  
Wayne Marc Godfrey

Robert Jones  
James Atherton  
Jan Pace  
Rory Gilmartin  
Afolabi Kuti  
John McDonnell  
Billy O'Brien  
Avril Daly  
Ruairi Robinson  
Robbie Ryan  
Bertrand Faivre  
Ruth Kenley-Letts

#### Cast

Max Records

John Wayne Cleaver  
Laura Fraser  
April Cleaver  
Christina Baldwin  
Aunt Margaret  
Karl Geary  
Dr Neblin  
Dee Noah  
Kay Crowley  
Anna Sundberg  
Lauren Bacall Cleaver  
Raymond  
Brandstrom  
Max  
Lucile Lawton  
Brooke Watson

Christopher Lloyd  
Mr Crowley

In Colour  
[1.77:1]

Distributor  
Bulldog Film  
Distribution

Small-town Minnesota, present day. John Wayne Cleaver is a teenager with sociopathic tendencies who struggles to form emotional attachments and restrain his aggression. His mother runs a funeral parlour but is loath to have him join the family firm, since he's already worryingly obsessed with true-crime stories. These interests have a practical application, however, when a series of mysterious slayings befall the town, and John realises the killer's penchant for removing organs represents a pattern – though he is puzzled by the deposits of tar-like substance left by the corpses.

John is seeing a sympathetic therapist, Dr Neblin, who helps him manage his condition, while assessing his latent potential to become a serial killer. John tracks

his elderly neighbour Mr Crowley and discovers that the latter is the killer, and that in fact he may not be human. Instead of telling the police, a fascinated John continues his surveillance; Dr Neblin is the next victim.

John signals to Crowley that he's on his case by menacing Crowley's beloved wife while the old man is out seeking prey; he learns that Crowley is a monster who feeds on human flesh in order to remain with his spouse. Crowley, now deteriorating physically through age, pursues John to the chapel during a funeral and corners John's mother in the basement embalming room. Mother and son see Crowley's full unearthly form, then together replace his bloodstream with embalming fluid, destroying him.





A woman of substances: Krisha Fairchild playing the title character in Trey Edward Shults's exploration of the emotional highs and lows of addiction

## Krisha

USA 2015

Director: Trey Edward Shults

Certificate 15 81m 57s

### Reviewed by Violet Lucca

A confessional narrative that expresses the emotional contours of addiction without explicating them, *Krisha* is as perfect as a debut feature could hope to be – most of its flaws turn out to be strengths. Wearing all the hallmarks of an American micro-budget indie on its sleeve – a single location (the director's mother's house in Texas), a largely non-professional cast (the director's family), a story centred on a prodigal daughter (a combination of the director's aunt Nica, biological father and cousin, all of whom died because of their addictions) returning home and making a pig's ear out of a family gathering – Trey Edward Shults's film transcends the potential clichés each of these elements contains and makes something accessible and personal.

This break from convention is instantly apparent from *Krisha*'s opening shot: while ominous, bass-driven orchestral music plays, Krisha (Krisha Fairchild, another of the director's aunts) stands bare-shouldered in a dark room, staring down the camera as it slowly zooms in on her. Like something pulled from a horror movie and stuck into the film's chamber drama, the not-so-subtle message is that this post-menopausal, white-wavy-haired woman is a monster of sorts – a status that shifts between self-designated and earned as the story

progresses. The sense of unease in this moment is carried throughout the film by a variety of formal strategies: the ambient noise in scenes of regular family gambol is conspicuously turned up, making it chaotic and anxiety-producing; intimate chats between characters are frequently preceded by Krisha peeping/eavesdropping on them, colouring these otherwise warm or funny exchanges with voyeurism and isolation; long, masterfully mapped Steadicam shots glide uncomfortably close to the characters, finally settling on some unconventional framing; and all of this driven by the uneasy thumping of a tom-tom, plucked strings and electronic noise.

These are all essentially variations of tropes from *Repulsion* (1965) or *The Lost Weekend* (1945), signalling that it's only a matter of time before our protagonist surrenders all reason to the monkey on her back. Aside from the technical skill with which it's executed, there's something especially destabilising about this particular type of expressionism unfolding in a suburban McMansion – that sprawling, two-storey-hall house, which represents the pinnacle of financial accomplishment to the vast majority of Americans, offers no refuge for Krisha or her long-suffering relatives. (Shults has said in interviews that he chose his mother's house because of its high ceilings, and they interrupt the flow of the smaller, sitcom-like rooms with a churchy feeling.)

This question of space is central to the plot, for Krisha has lost her place within the family. Her first Thanksgiving back with the folks after an untold amount of time, she's tasked with

preparing a turkey all by herself while her sister Robyn (the director's mother) runs to fetch their elderly mother (the director's grandmother, who suffers from dementia) from a home. Krisha's small but grandiose gesture is unmanageable under such high-stakes circumstances, a misplaced effort in a Sisyphean situation rather than an instance of 'too little, too late'. (Trying to get back into the swing of things at a major family holiday is always doomed to fail, even if you're not recovering from substance abuse.)

Over the course of the bird's hours-long cooking time, Krisha busies herself with observing how the others interact, and tries to have friendly chats with whoever will give her an audience. Her brother-in-law Doyle (the superb Bill Wise), who jokes about killing one of his wife's many dogs and uses words like 'malinformed' when he really means 'misinformed', is the sort of convivially brusque guy you'd feel lucky meeting at a Texas bar. (You know, a real authentic experience.) But their banter turns suddenly sour after Krisha throws some New-Agey caginess back at his forthright questions about her time away from the family. Doyle doesn't just mistrust Krisha, he resents her, and is worse than she is at pretending everything is OK. "You make it sound like you're just some college kid popping your way across the Alps on some little European backpack excursion, trying to find yourself," he says. "Jesus, shit, man, you're in your sixties. Get your ducks in a row."

This burnt-out resentment also colours Krisha's heart-to-heart with her estranged son Trey (the director), who can barely stand to





look at her. Again, because specific details of what Krisha has or hasn't done over the years get elided (and because Fairchild masterfully projects an aura of unfailing innocence), we're left to project how deep this well of hurt goes, and how equipped anyone present is to deal with it. Shults is superb at silently conveying bitterness and discomfort, and when he rebuffs Krisha's advice to choose filmmaking over business school in a messy, delayed outburst, the pain on both sides is palpable.

Amid these tiny defeats (and a few interludes of family life, involving arm wrestling, a dad struggling with basic computer stuff and a pair of cousins watching a porno), Krisha scurries upstairs to her room to stare at herself in the bathroom mirror, echoing the film's opening shot. These desperate attempts to recentre herself also reveal the film's version of Chekhov's gun: a giant ziplock baggie of pills she's brought with her, which may or may not be prescription. After seeing her mother – who ambiguously recognises her – Krisha goes upstairs and, unable to reach her addiction support sponsor/partner on the phone, hacks open a bottle of red with a pair of nose-hair clippers and downs half the contents. While Nina Simone's 'Just in Time' plays, the camera, moving with the drowsiness that a nice Cabernet brings, records the family swarming around the kitchen in slow motion and Krisha pulling the perfectly cooked turkey out of the oven and dropping it on the floor. (While this might strike some as a calculated little bit of theatre, where the centrepiece of a holiday and the film is destroyed, the experience it's based on is even more harrowing: Shults's aunt, while high, tried to take the roasting turkey out of the oven without mitts.)

After the turkey has hit the floor, the action abruptly resumes normal speed – an experience as jarring and overwhelming to viewers as it is to Krisha. In the chaos of the clean-up (with Doyle shouting wisecracks in the background), Krisha is confronted about the bottle in her room, tries to lie about it and is then shuttled back upstairs. With the monster unleashed, the torture, formerly ambient, is now entirely self-inflicted. (As many addicts will tell you, self-destruction can sometimes be a form of taking control: *you're* the one choosing to push all the cards off the table.) Krisha puts on a home movie of one of Trey's childhood birthdays, passes out, leaves an angry voicemail for her sponsor and then goes downstairs and demands to eat with the others.

*The messiness and sorrow of addiction are plain to see, through the perspective of someone we're not used to having as a main character: a plump, white-haired woman*



Wishful drinking: Krisha's eavesdropping colours warm or funny exchanges with voyeurism and isolation

Robyn takes her back upstairs, and proceeds to unload on her. The film's expressionist flourishes have aligned us with Krisha's perspective, so Robyn's grievances as the sister of an addict come off as they would to the addict: understandable but also completely unfair. (What Robyn tells Krisha at one point could easily be reversed: "I don't know how a person does this to another person. I've really had enough – enough of you.")

The final stretch of the film – featuring another trip downstairs, which culminates in a shoving match between the two sisters – takes this emotional-empathetic perspective to the extreme. Family photos, snippets of the day's events and overtly fictional set pieces all swirl together, taunting and pushing us further into the depths of this woman's feelings, all without oversimplifying or shunting it into some 'big speech' moment (even though that's what Krisha hoped to deliver by journeying downstairs again). The messiness and sorrow of addiction are plain to see, through the perspective of someone we're not used to having as a main character: a white-haired, round woman. But for all of Shults's aestheticised but not glamorised formalism, it's Fairchild's acting that carries us through. The film's final moment – Fairchild staring out of darkness into the camera, at first on the verge of tears but then coming to rest on a Mona Lisa smile – is a true knockout. Even Krisha probably wouldn't know what it meant. With age comes experience, though not always wisdom. ☺

#### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Justin R. Chan  
Trey Edward Shults  
Wilson Smith  
Chase Joliet

**Written by**  
Trey Edward Shults

**Cinematography**  
Drew Daniels

**Edited by**  
Trey Edward Shults

**Music**  
Brian McOmber

**Re-recording**  
Mixers  
Michael Semanick  
Sergio Reyes

**@Rooftop Films**

**Production**  
Company  
A Hoody Boy  
Productions  
production

A film by Trey  
Edward Shults  
**Executive**  
**Producers**  
Jonathan R. Chan  
J.P. Castel

#### Cast

**Krisha Fairchild**  
Krisha

**Alex Dobrenko**  
Alex

**Robyn Fairchild**  
Robyn

**Chris Doubek**  
Dr Becker

**Victoria Fairchild**  
Vicki

**Bryan Casserly**  
Logan

**Chase Joliet**  
Chase  
**Atheena Frizzell**

Atheena  
**Augustine Frizzell**  
Augustine  
**Olivia Grace**  
Applegate  
Olivia

**Rose Nelson**  
baby Rose

**Bill Wise**  
Doyle

**Trey Edward Shults**  
Trey

**Billie Fairchild**  
Grandma

**In Colour**  
[1.85:1], [2.35:1]  
and [1.33:1]

**Distributor**  
Studiocanal Limited

US, the present. Krisha pulls her suitcase through a district of Austin, Texas, looking for her sister Robyn's house at Thanksgiving. Robyn later shows Krisha around the kitchen, and Krisha agrees to cook the turkey while Robyn goes to get their elderly mother ready for the dinner. Krisha shares a smoke with brother-in-law Doyle, who complains about how much he hates his wife's dogs. Krisha interrupts a game of ad libs to ask her son Trey to have a one-to-one talk; he becomes annoyed at her advice and walks out. Krisha's conversation with Doyle continues, and grows hostile. Krisha's mother arrives, and asks what she did wrong. Krisha calls her addiction support sponsor, but gets no response. She opens a bottle of wine in the bathroom and drinks most of it. As she takes the turkey out of the oven, she drops it. When her bottle is discovered, she tries to blame it on Doyle, and is escorted to her room. She passes out, wakes, goes downstairs and is promptly led back up by Robyn, who tells her how much her behaviour hurts the family. Krisha replays this moment, takes another drug, and returns downstairs, demanding that Trey tell her he loves her. Robyn and Krisha start shouting, and Krisha begins throwing things. The sisters almost fight, but are pulled off each other.



## Allied

USA/People's Republic of China 2016  
Director: Robert Zemeckis  
Certificate 15 124m 28s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

**Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist**

Simply the fact that *Allied* is a tale of wartime romance and intrigue set (partially) in Vichy-run Casablanca, with a climax set on an airfield (rainy rather than foggy) as lovers don't quite make that last flight to neutral territory, is enough to show that Robert Zemeckis isn't afraid of comparisons – and this slightly too solemn tosh invites plenty, as it juggles the seemingly irreconcilable traditions of ruthless action larks and simmering erotic suspense. The former is epitomised by a choreographed massacre, as well-dressed star couple Brad Pitt and Marion Cotillard cut loose with Sten guns at an embassy reception and mow down about a dozen Nazis without mussing their perfect coiffures. Even an exposition-heavy jaunt to France to interview a drunken imprisoned *maquisard* about a plot point (the ability – or not – to play 'La Marseillaise' on the piano) finds time for a movie-hero beat, as Pitt deftly tosses a grenade into a German armoured car and then executes the wounded crew with precise headshots.

However, the film invests more in swoons than shootouts – Max (Pitt) and Marianne (Cotillard) first make love in a car in the middle of the desert during a sandstorm. Later relationship moments are overshadowed by WWII, as she gives birth to their daughter during an air-raid, and a last wild party breaks up when a downed German bomber crashes on Hampstead Heath, where the family spends 'one perfect day' before getting on with the business of betrayal and summary execution. It's a bit of a fudge, distantly reminiscent of Hitchcock's *Notorious* (1946) – without the moral complexity to go with the tension between true love and the cruel dictates of the spy game. It's symptomatic of an inability to come to grips with the characters in any but the most banal terms that we never actually find out who one of the leads really is – or have any but the thinnest notion of why they would undertake such an extensive charade.

Screenwriter Steven Knight manages a modest innovation by stressing the homefront licence for bad behaviour afforded by the war: Max's sister (the welcome, underused Lizzy



The unusual suspect: Marion Cotillard, Brad Pitt

Caplan) has an openly lesbian relationship; a flier lists the drugs he'll need to take to get through a mission (which he doesn't survive); and partiers at Max and Marianne's Hampstead home snort cocaine and rut in every wardrobe. However, all this disreputable business at the edges of the frame serves to show how drearily conventional Max and Marianne's sexy marriage is – there's a hint they might still be playing out the sham marriage they earlier had in Casablanca, with the repetition of bits of business and lines about what 'a real husband' would do. But the ridiculous runaround of the last reel confirms that they really are as superficial and thinly conceived as they seem to be.

As a glossy star vehicle, this sticks a waxy-looking Pitt with being stiff and bad-tempered, while the radiant Cotillard is at her best when left alone on screen – pondering her options in two long sequences where Max leaves Marianne in the car while executing Nazi spies (no thought of interrogating or turning them) or tries to hijack a bomber. Not quite excessive enough to be classed as camp, this is still sillier than it is sensual. **S**

## Almost Christmas

USA/People's Republic of China/Japan 2016  
Director: David E. Talbert

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

Aiming low and shooting its own toes off, this all-black holiday comedy is so recycled and insubstantial it's difficult to retain in the mind even as you're watching – which does not in any case seem to be the filmmakers' ambition. The agenda is only to kill time, by asphyxiating it with clichés. You know the drill: huggable, sweater-wearing, post-Rockwell family treacle, peopled by stock personas (dependable dad, sassy single aunt, bickering grown kids, irksome in-laws, adorably precocious tykes), dolloped with seasonal homilies and greeting-card wistfulness, and tricked out with straining comedy set pieces, which include getting stuck climbing through a window and making a child try the aunt's horrible cooking by forcing it down his throat. Danny Glover, who at 70 has little more than this kind of pay cheque to look forward to, is mostly concerned throughout with trying to make the perfect sweet-potato pie without his recently deceased wife's recipe.

The rest of the cast are gorgeously perky and sitcom-ready; Mo'Nique, as the quip-throwing aunt-diva with a personal history as a back-up singer to famous bands, nails her bitchy moments, though the underwritten script often settles for a "Damn!" instead of a line. While the ostensible comedy rattles on, you pine for the relief of sticky-sweet earnestness (there's actually a save-the-homeless-shelter subplot), and then vice versa, but for all of that there's very little to do with Christmas – no presents are ever opened, and the tree is never decorated. Maybe it happened, and writer-director David E. Talbert forgot to shoot it: at several points, the film edits around things (a neighbour's mother, a cicada in a girl's hair – in December?) that are only described or heard off screen.

Almost predictably, the film's heartwarming desires are kneecapped by its own need for crass comedy, and a picture of this particular Birmingham, Alabama, family emerges that no one could've intended. They are, we see, riven by the animosity between the two grown



Family matters: *Almost Christmas*

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Graham King  
Robert Zemeckis  
Steve Starkey  
**Written by**  
Steven Knight  
**Director of Photography**  
Don Burgess  
**Edited by**  
Jeremiah O'Driscoll  
Mick Audsley  
**Production Designer**  
Gary Freeman  
**Music Composed and Conducted by**  
Alan Silvestri  
**Sound Designers**  
Randy Thom  
Jeremy Bowker  
**Costume Designer**  
Joanna Johnston  
**Stunt Co-ordinator**  
Franklin Henson  
  
©Paramount Pictures Corporation

**Production Companies**  
Paramount Pictures presents in association with Huahua Media a GK Films production  
**A Robert Zemeckis film**  
**Executive Producers**  
Patrick McCormick  
Steven Knight  
Denis O'Sullivan  
Jack Rapke  
Jacqueline Levine

**Cast**  
**Brad Pitt**  
Max Vatan  
**Marion Cotillard**  
Marianne Beauséjour  
**Jared Harris**  
Frank Heslop  
**Simon McBurney**  
S.O.E. official  
**Lizzy Caplan**

Bridget Vatan  
**Daniel Betts**  
George Kavanagh  
**Matthew Goode**  
Guy Sangster  
**Camille Cottin**  
Monique  
**August Diehl**  
Hobar  
**Thierry Frémont**  
Paul Delamare

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]  
Part-subtitled

**Distributor**  
Paramount Pictures UK

In 1942, Canadian intelligence officer Max Vatan travels to Casablanca to pose as the husband of a woman he's never met, French Resistance agent Marianne Beauséjour. While posing as man and wife, the couple fall in love.

After they have carried out their mission – assassinating a German official – Max petitions his superiors to allow Marianne to join him in London, where they marry and have a daughter, Anna. In 1944, Max's superiors tell him they believe his wife is a German agent who has replaced the real Marianne. He is ordered to let her see an item of false intelligence, which – if it turns up in German communiqués – will prove her guilt. Max flies to France to talk with a Resistance fighter who knows Marianne – and learns that the real Marianne could play the piano, which his wife is unable to do. Marianne confesses her guilt but claims she really loves Max. After murdering his wife's Nazi handlers, Max tries to take her and Anna out of the country rather than carry out an order to execute her. When they are caught at the airfield, Marianne commits suicide to save Max from being hanged as a traitor.



## The Ardennes

Belgium/The Netherlands 2015

Director: Robin Pront

Certificate 15 95m 53s

### Reviewed by Adrian Martin

The Ardennes is a region of Belgium that brothers Dave and Kenny, who have both fallen on hard times, nostalgically remember as an emblem of their lost, innocent childhood. Alas, it is also the place they must head to when everything in their current lives goes catastrophically wrong and a dead body lies in the boot of their car.

How did they reach this sorry pass? Director Robin Pront and co-writer Jeroen Perceval (who also takes the role of Dave) stress the misery of the brothers' working-class background, the ever-constant temptation of addiction to drugs or alcohol, and the lack of compassion or understanding from prospective employers. Kenny, especially, has turned into a hard case: there is barely a frame of the film where the muscles of his face are not fixed in a taut, defensive, angry grimace.

*The Ardennes* aims for realism (for instance, in its underlining of the brothers' Flemish roots), but it mainly follows the path of cliché. Everything seems to have been woven from memories of other movies dealing with similar plot material. The gruesomeness of amateur corpse-disposal procedures evokes the Coens' *No Country for Old Men* (2007). The figure of the tight-lipped, complicit mother recalls the Australian low-life saga *Snowtown* (2011). Most risibly, in the long scenes devoted to Kenny's accomplices Stef and Joyce, Pront borrows the caricature of a deviant, perverse, underworld sexuality (a killer in drag and lipstick, his sadistic boss with a mental disorder) from David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* (1986) – but without any larger context to raise this portrait of 'crazies' above cheap sensationalism. And then, of course, there is the long history – hard for any budding filmmaker to avoid – of criminal-brothers-at-odds stories, from tough-guy gangster pictures of the 1930s to the oeuvre of James Gray (*Little Odessa*, 1994). On this level, *The Ardennes* reaches for a little mythic, elemental, quasi-biblical potency, but fumbles badly.

There are some involving scenes. Raymond Durnat once analysed the famous Mount



The bright stuff: Jeroen Perceval

Rushmore sequence in Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* (1958) as offering an excruciating situation – will the villain, finally, help or doom his nemesis? – which transmutes sheer suspense mechanics into compact, ethical drama. Pront handles several turning points of *The Ardennes* in a similar fashion, hanging on those moments when Dave must decide to confess to the waiting police or follow Kenny in his nocturnal mission; or when, in the midst of furious fighting, we are not sure who exactly will choose to kill or spare whom.

But Pront's stylistic treatment of the material never lifts itself above an empty, flashy, 'quality TV' level. One quickly tires of scene transitions in which booming, musical crescendos give way to sudden silence, and a further dozen such affectations. *The Ardennes* does, however, boast a few, intriguingly surreal oddities. A pair of wild, rampaging ostriches play a pivotal role in the plot. And it is surely rare to find, beyond the zombie genre, a film that concludes on a rousing disco track with the splendid lyrics, "I love you / Although you're dead." 🍷

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Will Packer

#### Written by

David E. Talbert

#### Director of

Photography

Larry Blanford

#### Editor

Troy Takaki

#### Production

Designer

Wynn Thomas

#### Music

John Paesano

#### Sound Mixer

Todd Weaver

#### Costume Designer

Sekinah Brown

©Universal Studios

#### Production

Companies

Universal Pictures

presents in

association with

Perfect World

Pictures a Will

#### Packer Productions

production

A David E. Talbert film

Presented in

association with

Dentsu Inc./

Fuji Television

Network, Inc.

#### Executive

Producers

Lyn Sisson-Talbert

David E. Talbert

Preston Holmes

James Lopez

Gabrielle Union

Jeff Morrone

#### Cast

Kimberly Elise

Cheryl

Omar Epps

Malachi

Danny Glover

Walter Meyers

John Michael

Higgins

#### Brooks

Romany Malco

Christian Meyers

Mo'Nique

Aunt May

Nicole Ari Parker

Sonya

JB Smoove

Lonnie

Gabrielle Union

Rachel

Jessie T. Usher

Evan Meyers

Keri Hilson

Jasmine

DC Young Fly

Eric

#### In Colour

[2.35:1]

#### Distributor

Universal Pictures

International

UK & Eire

Present-day Birmingham, Alabama. Five days before Christmas, the Meyers family gathers for the holidays. Walter, whose wife died earlier in the year, is joined by his four children and their partners: successful dentist Cheryl and her flirtatious husband Lonnie, a former basketball star; divorced struggling law-school student Rachel; congressional campaigner Christian and his wife Sonya; and college athlete Evan. Also present are several grandchildren, brassy Aunt May and Christian's venal campaign director. A lifelong feud between Cheryl and Rachel causes constant arguments. Meanwhile Walter searches for his wife's old pie recipe, and next-door neighbour Malachi tries to reignite a high-school romance with Rachel. The sisters' skirmishes culminate in Rachel trying to sabotage Cheryl's marriage by inviting Lonnie's newfound girlfriend to dinner. The holiday spirit is further dampened by Walter's plan to sell the house and the fact that Christian's campaign plan is jeopardising the local homeless shelter, to which Walter's wife was devoted. Agitated and addicted to pain pills, Evan crashes his car. Everybody makes up in the hospital, and Walter finally perfects the pie.

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Producer

Bart Van

Langendonck

#### Screenplay

Jeroen Perceval

Robin Pront

Based on the play

by Jeroen Perceval

#### Cinematography

Robrecht Heyvaert

#### Editor

Alain Dessauvage

#### Production Design

Geert Paredis

#### Original Music

Hendrik Willems

#### Sound

Robil Rahantoecknam

#### Costumes

Geert Paredis

@Savage Film/

Eyeworks Belgium/

SCIO Productions/

PRPL/Bastide Films

#### Production

Companies

Savage Film presents

in co-production with

eyeworks Belgium,

SCIO Productions,

PRPL, Bastide Films

with the support

of Vlaams

Audiotvisueel Fonds

(VAF), Nederlands

Filmfonds, Screen

Flanders, Agentschap

Ondernemen,

Belgische Tax Shelter

voor film financiering,

MEDIA Programma

van de E.U.

in association with

Telenet – STAP,

Kinepolis Film

Distributie, VTM

A film by Robin Pront

#### Executive Producer

Xavier Rombaut

#### Cast

Kevin Janssens

Kenneth

Jeroen Perceval

Dave

Veerle Baetens

Sylvie

Jan Bijvoet

Stef

Viviane De Muynck

Mariette

Sam Louwyck

Joyce

Peter Van Den Begin

Robert

Eric Godon

Gerard

Rachid 'Appa'

#### El Ghazoui

Chalid

Nico Sturm

Danny

#### In Colour

[2.35:1]

#### Subtitles

#### Distributor

StudioCanal Limited

Belgian theatrical title

D'Ardennes

Belgium, the recent past. A brutal robbery involving brothers Dave and Kenny and Kenny's girlfriend Sylvie goes hopelessly wrong. Kenny is left behind at the crime scene. He is arrested and spends four years in jail. On his release, he senses tension in his former social circle: everyone but Kenny knows that Sylvie is now with Dave, and is expecting his child. While Dave procrastinates about telling him the truth, the aggressive Kenny focuses his jealous suspicions on Chalid, owner of the club where Sylvie works as a waitress. An increasingly distressed Dave

falters in his struggle against alcoholism. Kenny confronts his brother with a new problem: he has killed Chalid, and they must dispose of his corpse in the Ardennes, with the help of criminal friends Stef and Joyce. Dave flees to a police station, but Kenny arrives in time and convinces him to return to their grisly task. Dave soon realises that he has been set up to be murdered; he fights back, and discovers that in fact it is Sylvie's corpse they have been transporting. Dave is shot and killed by police as he struggles with Kenny, who is carried away screaming.



## Bad Santa 2

USA/United Kingdom 2016  
Director: Mark Waters  
Certificate 15 92m 17s

### Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

Superficially, Terry Zwigoff's *Bad Santa* (2003) was not a logical follow-up to *Ghost World* (2001). But there was a strong thematic link: the latter's portrait of two female high-school friends growing up/apart showed their relationship fraying most particularly when Scarlett Johansson's character adapted without complaint to the boring working world, while Thora Birch's was fired almost instantly from a multiplex concession stand – she couldn't handle being talked down to by a supercilious manager for pay that was presumably just over minimum wage. Billy Bob Thornton's drunk Santa was combustible for the same reasons: a lifetime of economic marginalisation under demeaning conditions, combined with personal trauma. The perspective of heckling rage against everything mainstream was entirely consistent with *Ghost World's* portrait of a young woman increasingly cognisant of her alienation from the world.

With Zwigoff not involved in this sequel, that feeling is, unsurprisingly, missing. Willie T. Stokes (Thornton), a furiously foul-mouthed sex addict with an unsparingly self-loathing diagnosis of himself, is still much the same at the film's opening: Pepé Le Pew-ishy leering at women, a cigarette and flask ever at the ready, along with a profane tirade for anyone who dares to speak to him. But the sense of a rage born of a particular type of job is absent: where a great deal of the first film hinged its comic set pieces on the indignities of mall work, there's no sense here of being rooted in a specific economic context.

The sequel's writers and director are new, and the first film's furiously obscene, quotable



Santa is coming to frown: Billy Bob Thornton

constant highlights are gone. Thornton, somehow even leaner than 13 years ago, is still capable of spitting out disgusted dialogue against himself and all others in a way that transcends caricature, entirely in keeping with his post-*Santa* parts in the same vein a decade ago (*Bad News Bears*, *The Ice Harvest*). Willie continues to rail against himself, his traitorous little-person partner Marcus (Tony Cox) and autistic-spectrum orphan follower Thurman Merman (Brett Kelly, back from the original and still tremendously/oddly endearing), but his rage, unquenchable in the first film, is now a cute quirk to be soothingly quelled by the end. He learns life lessons and grows as a human being, all precisely on schedule.

Per sequel norms, the stakes are similar but bigger: more cash to be plundered, a new location (Montreal-as-Chicago instead of Los-Angeles-as-Phoenix), the same players plus a few more. We meet Willie's mom Sunny (Kathy Bates), whose casual abusiveness presumably 'explains' and deepens him. That she calls him by his childhood nickname 'Shitstick' dozens of times, with never-increasing hilarity, indicates this sequel's diminishingly inventive approach to rearranging the staples of vernacular profanity as a comic tool. There's plenty of plot-recap time at the beginning, and a new girlfriend (Christina Hendricks) at the end as a reward for our semi-redeemed protagonist.

The rhythm is still there between Thornton and the first film's returning partners, but the psychologising pathos is misguided and grating. As shot by Theo van de Sande (*Wayne's World*, *Grown Ups*), it looks like the work of a regular Happy Madison collaborator: digital, ugly, lo-res. Grossness of character has been traded for gross-outs of the weakest kind (Sunny waves a dildo at her understandably estranged son), and there are jokes about Instagram to keep up with the times. The first film's restrained camerawork and simple *mise en scène* drew greater attention to the ugliness of surroundings further depressing Willie. The sequel is considerably busier: a sequence in which Marcus shimmies through the vents of the Christmas charity they're planning to rob, predictably being pelted by disgusting garbage along the way, is shot like a lazy *Mission: Impossible* parody, with plenty of different angles failing to disguise the reality of a character padding out the running time by moving through some cheap sets. The first film was depressive, this one's just depressing. ☹

## Ballerina

Canada/France 2016  
Directors: Eric Summer, Eric Warin  
Certificate U 89m 8s

### Reviewed by Kate Stables

Perky, plot-packed and crammed with girl-power messages, this French-Canadian CGI-animated family feature is unashamedly aimed at an international audience. Visually, its glossily detailed, near-real Belle Époque Paris recalls both *Ratatouille* (2007) and *A Monster in Paris* (2011), though its cutely snub-nosed characters and graft-till-you-make-it ballet plot are fairly generic by comparison.

Spunky orphan heroine Félicie's determined progress from street kid to 'petit rat' dance student at the Opera has a number of tropes familiar from the Barbie films (the poor girl despised by a privileged rival, drilled relentlessly by a secret coach, physically threatened by an ambitious adult). But directors Eric Summer and Eric Warin put a bit of new spin on these well-worn story staples and the pleasantly pert dialogue around them. There are riskier-than-normal plot twists too, taking in identity theft and the kind of huge setback rarely featured in kids' movies.

The voice work is generally good, particularly Dane DeHaan's excitable young inventor Victor. However, Elle Fanning's unsinkable Félicie has the vocal pep that drives the action on. It's a neat fit with her springy, restless onscreen form, forever whipping through dance routines or swooping on Victor's flying invention around a half-built Eiffel Tower. ☺

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Laurent Zeitoun Yann Zenou Nicolas Duval Adassovsky André Rouleau Valérie d'Auteuil <b>Screenplay</b> Carol Noble Laurent Zeitoun Eric Summer Based on a story by Eric Summer, Laurent Zeitoun Based on an idea by Eric Summer <b>Director of Photography</b> Jerica Cleland <b>Editor</b> Yann Thibaudeau <b>Art Director</b> Florent Masurel <b>Music</b> Klaus Badelt <b>Sound</b> Jean Goudier Cyril Holtz <b>Animation Director</b> Theodore Ty  ©Mitico, Gaumont, M6 Films, PCF Ballerina le Film Inc.	<b>Production Companies</b> Gaumont presents a Quad, Main Journey and Caramel Films production in co-production with Gaumont, M6 Films and with the financial participation of Telefilm Canada, SODEC, Radio Canada With the participation of Canal+, Ciné+, M6, W9, 6ter A film by Eric Summer and Eric Warin Produced in association with The Movie Network and Super Écran Developed with the support of Apidev 3, Cinéma 5 Développement, Cinéma 7 Développement, Alvy Productions With the support of CNC (New Technologies of	<b>Production), Angoa</b> <b>Executive Producer</b> Jean Aubert  <b>Voice Cast</b> <b>Elle Fanning</b> Félicie <b>Dane DeHaan</b> Victor <b>Maddie Ziegler</b> Camille <b>Carly Rae Jepsen</b> Odette  <b>Dolby Digital In Colour</b> [2.35:1]  <b>Distributor</b> E1 Films
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France, 1879. Ballet-mad orphan Félicie runs away to Paris from a Breton orphanage with her friend Victor. Passing herself off as the rich Camille, she joins the Opera ballet class. She trains secretly with ex-dancer and Opera cleaner Odette. The real Camille appears, and both girls audition for the role of Clara in 'The Nutcracker'. Exhausted by sleeping rough and upset because of a rift with Victor, Félicie fails to get the part, and is sent back to Brittany. Dashing back to Paris, she reunites with Victor, and has a triumphant dance-off with Camille. Camille concedes the role, and Félicie performs as Clara on the ballet's first night.

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Geyer Kosinski Andrew Gunn <b>Written by</b> Johnny Rosenthal Shauna Cross Based on characters created by Glenn Ficarra, John Requa <b>Director of Photography</b> Theo Van de Sande <b>Editor</b> Travis Sittard <b>Production Designer</b> Isabelle Guay <b>Music</b> Lyle Workman <b>Production Sound Mixer</b> Simon Poudrette <b>Costume Designer</b> Mario Davignon <b>Stunt Co-ordinator</b> Dave McKeown	<b>©Santamax Distribution, LLC</b> <b>Production Companies</b> Broadgreen Pictures and Miramax present in association with Ingenious Produced by Springdale Films Limited <b>Executive Producers</b> Zanne Devine David Thwaites Daniel Hammond Gabriel Hammond Mark Waters Jessica Tuchinsky Adam Fields Doug Ellin  <b>Cast</b> <b>Billy Bob Thornton</b> Willie T. Soke <b>Kathy Bates</b>	<b>Sunny Soke</b> <b>Tony Cox</b> Marcus Skidmore <b>Christina Hendricks</b> Diane Hastings <b>Brett Kelly</b> Thurman Merman <b>Ryan Hansen</b> Regent Hastings <b>Jenny Zigrino</b> Gina De Luca <b>Jeff Skowron</b> Dorfman  <b>In Colour</b> [1.85:1]  <b>Distributor</b> E1 Films
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US, the present. As he's about to commit suicide, alcoholic safecracker Willie is contacted by former criminal partner Marcus, who asks him to be part of a \$2m heist in Chicago. Arriving in the city, Willie is unpleasantly surprised to learn that the caper is organised by his estranged mother Sunny. In the process of embedding himself at the Christmas charity they're going to rob, Willie becomes involved with its co-director Diane. During the robbery, both Sunny and Marcus attempt to double-cross and kill Willie. The money is lost and Willie is paroled, beginning a new life as a hospital janitor.



# The Birth of a Nation

USA/Canada 2016  
Director: Nate Parker  
Certificate 15 119m 43s

## Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

With long-time dream project *The Birth of a Nation*, a biopic of Nat Turner, the renegade slave who led an uprising against the white gentry of Southampton County, Virginia, in 1831, director/star/co-scenarist/producer Nate Parker has achieved something truly remarkable. He has managed to make a film about race war that is as dull as ditchwater.

That's the movie itself – but it's hard to remember another film that has had such an exciting extra-cinematic existence. *The Birth of a Nation* first appeared amid a clamour of premature Sundance praise, treated to standing ovations before the opening credits rolled, and purchased for a king's ransom by Fox Searchlight Pictures, whose representatives saw a film fit for dutiful must-see status and innumerable think pieces on 'The Conversation We Need to Be Having About Race in America'. Between this and the march to awards-season coronation, however, came renewed scrutiny of a rape that Parker and fellow screenwriter Jean McGianni Celestin were alleged to have committed in 1999 when roommates and wrestling teammates at Penn State University, and suddenly the think pieces were of the 'Can You Separate the Art from the Artist?' variety. Seen as I finally saw it, in mid-November in New York City, *The Birth of a Nation* now has the quality of an almost touching relic, something readymade to be fitted into a montage about the ramping up of the culture wars in the blissfully oblivious final year of the Obama administration, put between a clip of the all-female *Ghostbusters* remake, Trump's appearances on *Saturday Night Live* and *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*, and the aside in Lena Dunham's Hillary Clinton-boosting 'Sensual Pantsuit' music video where she says, "I wonder if I'm actually hurting her chances?"

Throughout all this, *The Birth of a Nation* has remained very much the same movie, and a very bad movie it is and has always been. The issue of separating the art from the artist is, in fact, a moot point – there is no art here. Parker and Celestin's imagination of Turner's life and death has the conscientious diligence of an in-class presentation, and not a single unexpected thing occurs in the course of its rhythmless two-hour running time. I am not certain I have ever seen another movie that so completely conformed to my expectation of what it would be in every single detail, with not a single spontaneous or human digression interrupting its lockstep trudge towards Turner's apotheosis on the hangman's scaffold. Everything is in its place, even the ghastly bits, from a force-feeding scene very near to that in Gualtiero Jacopetti and Franco Prosperi's *Goodbye Uncle Tom* (1971), to the whipping-post and the employment of Nina Simone's 'Strange Fruit' on the soundtrack. It feels like a 'TK' placeholder waiting for the real movie to come along, a concatenation of first-draft fallback clichés with none of the fine shading or emphasis that is the job of a real artist. The approach is dutiful, museumified; the *mise en scène* diorama-like; the palette blanched and desaturated, the one concession to the picturesque coming in the frequent photographing of solid shafts of light breaking



Rebel yell: Colman Domingo, Nate Parker

through Spanish moss or the slats of a tobacco barn. One supposes that this, along with the awkward period patois and historical detail that wouldn't pass muster in colonial Williamsburg, is intended to transport an audience to Jacksonian America, but Parker never captures the sense of the (dys)functional social order on a living plantation, or of a messy life that is carrying on beyond the boundaries of his studious frame.

Any question that this 'flatness' might be a directorial tactic to repress emotion until the moment of Turner's ascent should be put to rest by the use of the score, composer Henry Jackman stepping in with a ladle of treacle whenever Turner's images need a little help. This is quite frequently, thanks in no small part to Parker's

own typically superficial performance as Turner. His presence has never improved a movie and has actually sunk a few, such as Gina Prince-Bythewood's *Beyond the Lights* (2014), in which he conflates superciliousness and sincerity. We may forgive a performer's personal foibles if their image rings true – recall Godard's statement on swelling with love despite himself when George Wallace supporter John Wayne swept Natalie Wood up into his arms in *The Searchers* (1956) – but where a fierce, interior moral fortitude is required here, Parker has nothing in store but quizzical mugging close-ups. Depicting a would-be revolution, *The Birth of a Nation* oozes liberal good intentions and smug complacency – which is to say, it epitomised its era. ☹

## Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Nate Parker  
Kevin Turen  
Jason Michael Berman  
Aaron L. Gilbert  
Preston L. Holmes  
**Screenplay**  
Nate Parker  
**Story**  
Nate Parker  
Jean McGianni Celestin  
**Director of Photography**  
Elliot Davis  
**Edited by**  
Steven Rosenblum  
**Production Designer**  
Geoffrey Kirkland

**Music**  
Henry Jackman  
**Production Sound Mixer**  
Whitney Ince  
**Costume Designer**  
Francine Jamison-Tanchuck  
**©Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation and TSG Entertainment Finance LLC**  
**Production Companies**  
Fox Searchlight  
Pictures presents  
a Bronx Studios, Phantom Four,

Mandalay Pictures, Tiny Giant Productions production in association with Novofarm Productions, Follow Through Productions, Infinity Entertainment, Oster Media, Point Made Films, Juniper Productions, Argent Pictures, Hit 55 Ventures and Creative Wealth Media Finance Corp. Made in association with TSG Entertainment Supported by a grant

from the Sundance Institute Feature Film Program Fund  
**Executive Producers**  
David S. Goyer  
Michael Novogratz  
Michael Finley  
Tony Parker  
Jason Cloth  
Andy Pollack  
Allan J. Stitt  
Jane Oster  
Barb Lee  
Carl H. Lindner III  
Derrick Brooks  
Jill Ahrens  
Ryan Ahrens  
Armin Tehrani  
Edward Zwick  
Mark Moran

**Cast**  
**Nate Parker**  
Nat Turner  
**Armie Hammer**  
Samuel Turner  
**Mark Boone Jr**  
Reverend Zaltheal Colman Domingo  
Hark  
**Aunjanue Ellis**  
Nancy  
**Dwight Henry**  
Isaac Turner  
**Aja Naomi King**  
Cherry  
**Esther Scott**  
Bridget  
**Roger Guenveur Smith**  
Isaiah

**Gabrielle Union**  
Esther  
**Penelope Ann Miller**  
Elizabeth Turner  
**Jackie Earle Haley**  
Raymond Cobb

**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
20th Century Fox International (UK)

Southampton County, Virginia, the early 19th century. Nat Turner, a black slave child, is told by mystics still practising the old animist African religions that he is destined for greatness. He learns to read, and is encouraged to learn the Bible by the mistress of the plantation on which he lives, though this favour doesn't protect his family from the terror of local law enforcement when his father is driven away. As a grown man, Nat's literacy becomes a boon to his master Samuel, who tours local plantations with him and rents him out to fellow landowners so that he can preach servility to the slaves. Nat is married, and becomes a father, but his happiness is shattered when his wife is

raped by slave-catchers, leaving him no legal recourse for revenge. He and a small cabal of trusted associates begin to plot an insurrection, planning to lead a march on an armory in nearby Jerusalem. The rebellion begins at Turner's own plantation, where he cuts down his master with a hatchet, and continues to nearby properties. In Jerusalem, Turner and his band are met and carved to pieces by a waiting military force. Nat takes shelter in the woods as reprisals begin, with his surviving followers hanged en masse. In time, Nat is also taken into custody and hanged. As he dies, he glimpses an angel, a vision that is followed by the image of black troops plunging into battle in the American Civil War.



## The Black Hen

Nepal/Germany/France 2015  
Director: Min Bahadur Bham  
Certificate 12A 90m 21s

### Reviewed by Lisa Mullen

This semi-autobiographical debut feature from the young Nepali filmmaker Min Bahadur Bham is a richly atmospheric examination of the bitter loss of innocence suffered by a civilian population beset by civil war. Set in 2001, at the midpoint of the Maoist insurgency that killed tens of thousands of people in Nepal and displaced ten times more, the film does not attempt a sweeping treatment of the whole tragedy, but instead focuses tightly on the impact the conflict has on two young boys, Prakash (Khadka Raj Nepali) and Kiran (Sukra Raj Rokaya).

At first, the conflict appears to be tangential to the action: Kiran and Prakash are more concerned with their struggle to remain friends despite coming from different castes (Kiran is the son of the local headman, Prakash the son of his servant). When Prakash acquires a white hen, they convince themselves that all their troubles will be over once they start selling the eggs, but the indifferent and uncomprehending adult world seems determined to thwart their plans and separate Prakash from his beloved and (in his mind at least) endlessly profitable bird. But while the film gently indulges these naive hotshot fantasies, faint suggestions of trouble happening nearby – the jarring presence of soldiers in the sleepy village, the comically earnest dance performed at a Maoist recruiting rally – gradually resolve into something more urgent.

Like all plot macguffins, the hen is an all-purpose object of desire, and even its colour shifts from white to black to greyish, as if to emphasise its resistance to simple allegory. Instead, it operates as a carefully deployed distraction from Nepal's political convulsions, standing in for everything that isn't the war: hope, friendship, the idea of a happy future. If the boys' obsession with an object that perpetually slips from their grasp – it is variously bought, sold, hidden, discovered, stolen, lost, found and regularly said to be dead and/or eaten – seems sweetly silly, that is because we have not yet fully appreciated what is happening outside the charmed bubble of hen-based concerns. When, in the film's last act, the plucky duo set off on a journey into the unknown, we may think we are in for a cosy rite-of-passage



Obscure object of desire: *The Black Hen*

denouement. The journey will not, though, be the making of the boys, but perhaps their unmaking.

Aziz Zhabakiyev's cinematography beautifully echoes the film's narrative simplicity, with key scenes carefully framed and then left to play out in front of a barely moving camera, and a couple of slow-motion dream sequences offering insights into the motherless Prakash's troubled inner life. Inside the stillness of the frame, the mountain breeze constantly pesters flags and banners like a restless train of thought, and the earthy palette of the profoundly impoverished village is spiced with sun-bleached pinks and oranges as decorations are put up for a long-anticipated wedding. It's touches like these, coupled with the narrative restraint of the screenplay and the moving performances of the young leads, that earned the film a critics' prize at the 2015 Venice Film Festival. Min Bahadur Bham looks like one to watch. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Anna Katchko  
Tsering Rhytar Sherpa  
Min Bahadur Bham  
Devaki Rai  
Catherine Dussart  
**Screenplay**  
Min Bahadur Bham  
Abinash Bikram Shah  
**Story**  
Min Bahadur Bham  
Abinash Bikram Shah  
Santosh Bhattra  
Kushang Rai  
**Cinematography**  
Aziz Zhabakiyev  
**Editors**  
Nimesh Shrestha  
Aziz Zhabakiyev  
**Art Director**  
Menuka Rai  
**Music**  
Jason Kunwar  
**Sound**  
Bipon Stahpit

**Costume Designers**  
Nanda Keshar Bham  
Tara Khatri  
**Production Companies**  
Shooney Films, Mila Productions, Tandem Production, CDP in association with Kaldhungi Films present

**Cast**  
**Khadka Raj Nepali**  
Prakash  
**Sukra Raj Rokaya**  
Kiran  
**Jit Bahadur Malla**  
Prakash's father  
**Benisha Hamal**  
Kiran's sister  
**Hansa Khadka**  
Prakash's sister

**Nanda Prashad Khatri**  
**Bipin Karki**  
**Pravin Khatriwada**

**In Colour**  
[L78:1]  
**Subtitles**

**Distributor**  
Matchbox

Nepalese  
theatrical title  
**Kalo Pothi**

Mugu, north-western Nepal, 2001. Two young boys, Kiran and Prakash, are inseparable, despite the fact that they are from different castes: Kiran is the grandson of the village headman, Prakash the son of a servant. When Prakash's sister gives him a white hen, the idea of an egg business becomes the focus of the boys' hopes for the future. However, their dreams are shattered when Prakash's father sells the hen, and though they struggle desperately to raise money to buy it back, in the end they simply steal it, blackening it with dirt in a vain attempt to disguise it. Their crime is discovered and they lose the hen again; however, by now the village has more pressing problems. Maoist insurgents – including Prakash's sister, who has joined a roaming band of soldiers, and Kiran's brother-in-law, who was abducted on his wedding day – have broken a ceasefire, and the civil war is intensifying again. When the boys run away to search once more for the hen, their journey takes them close to the front line, where they witness the aftermath of a brutal bloodbath. They find the hen, but realise it's too late to return to their normal lives.

## Bleed for This

USA 2016  
Director: Ben Younger  
Certificate 15 116m 41s

### Reviewed by Nikki Baughan

From *Rocky* to *Raging Bull* to *Southpaw*, the world of the pugilist has long been a creative wellspring for big-screen storytellers. Now director Ben Younger (*Boiler Room*, *Prime*) taps this well-worn sporting vein to find the inspirational tale of real-life Rhode Island boxer Vinny 'Paz' Pazenza.

After being told to retire following a humiliating 1988 defeat, Vinny (Miles Teller) embarks on a new regime with booze-soaked trainer Kevin Rooney (Aaron Eckhart). Packing on the pounds and moving up two weight classes, he goes on to become world super middleweight champion. But then he breaks his neck in a near-fatal car crash – visually, the film's standout scene. Told that spinal-fusion surgery is his only chance to recover full mobility, but that it will end his career, he chooses instead to spend months wearing a painful metal 'halo' brace drilled into his skull. It is with this contraption attached that he returns to the family home and, without the knowledge of his protective manager-father (Ciarán Hinds) and perma-worried mother (Katey Sagal), embarks on a training regime with an initially reluctant Kevin, all with the aim of defending his title.

It sounds like the stuff of heavyweight human endeavour but, on screen, this remarkable story becomes pedestrian, Younger's screenplay lacking the psychological or emotional depth to put it in context. Vinny is reduced to two-dimensional jock, running the gamut of slow-motion training montages, pained close-ups and endless railing against naysayers. Even the final fight sequence, which returns Vinny to his former glory, isn't enough to validate the reckless behaviour that has led him to this point. It's a failure that lies entirely with the film, rather than the heroic fighter at its heart. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Bruce Cohen  
Emma Tillingier  
Koskoff  
Chad A. Verdi  
Noah Kraft  
Ben Younger  
Pamela Thur  
**Screenplay**  
Ben Younger  
**Story**  
Ben Younger  
Pippa Bianco  
Angelo Pizzo  
**Director of Photography**  
Larkin Seiple  
**Editor**  
Zac Stuart-Pontier  
**Production Designer**  
Kay Lee  
**Music**  
Julia Holter  
Featuring the music of:  
Willis Earl Beal  
**Sound Mixer**  
Kevin Parker  
**Costume Designer**  
Melissa Vargas

©Bleed for This, LLC  
**Production Companies**  
Magna Entertainment presents in association with Sikelia Productions, Verdi Productions, Bruce Cohen Productions, Younger Than You Productions and The Solution Entertainment Group a Ben Younger film  
**Executive Producers**  
Martin Soorse  
Joshua Sason  
Michelle Verdi  
Myles Nestel  
Lisa Wilson  
David Gendron  
Michael Hansen  
**Cast**  
**Miles Teller**  
Vinny Pazenza, 'Paz'  
**Aaron Eckhart**

Kevin Rooney  
**Katey Sagal**  
Louise Pazenza  
**Ciarán Hinds**  
Angelo Pazenza  
**Ted Levine**  
Lou Duva  
**Jordan Gelber**  
Dan Duva  
**Amanda Clayton**  
Doreen  
**Daniel Sauli**  
Jon  
**Christine Evangelista**  
woman in Caesar's Hotel room  
**Tina Casciani**  
Heather  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]  
**Distributor**  
Icon Film Distribution

Rhode Island, 1988. Soon after becoming world super middleweight champion, boxer Vinny Pazenza breaks his neck in a car crash. Refusing surgery that would end his career, he chooses instead to wear a painful 'halo' brace drilled into his skull. With the brace attached, he embarks on a training regime and, just over a year later, takes on the reigning champion.



# Chocolat

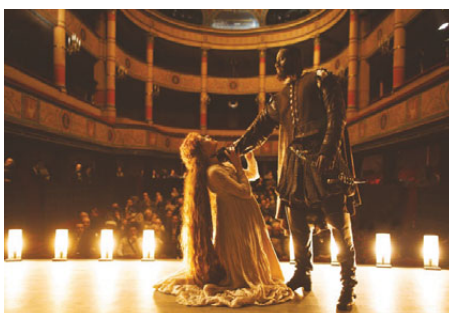
France 2015  
Director: Roschdy Zem  
Certificate 12A 119m 28s

## Reviewed by Fanta Sylla

Omar Sy is France's biggest black star today, thanks in part to his appearances on French TV as one half of a comedy duo with Fred Testot. That aspect of Sy's career plays into his biggest role so far, in Roschdy Zem's fourth feature, which traces the rise and fall of the clown Rafael Padilla, known as 'Chocolat', an ex-slave born in Cuba in the 1860s. At the end of the 19th century, Padilla was playing a stereotypical African cannibal character named Kananga in a provincial circus in northern France when the British clown George Footit (played by James Thierrée, grandson of Charlie Chaplin), searching for a more modern routine, persuaded him that they should form a duo. Together they created a new kind of comedy for the time, pairing the Pierrot-style whiteface clown with the ruder, wilder Auguste clown.

Apart from the Sherlock Holmes films, buddy period dramas are pretty rare. But the relationship between Footit and Chocolat, we discover, is problematic from the word go. The whiteface clown is supposedly superior in intellect, endowed of a profound sadness, while the Auguste is characterised by his clumsiness and innately happy disposition. This division of characteristics and personalities is heavily racialised here, and from early on Footit is shown exploiting audiences' racism and using his partner's dark skin for comic effect – in one scene he paints a portrait of him as a black stain. Footit may have saved Padilla from playing the cannibal eternally, but he only allows him to change his costume, not his position within the scene. Chocolat remains in a subservient place, presented as a silly, childish black man who deserves and gets constant punishment.

For Chocolat this triggers an introspective journey. When he spends a spell in jail for not possessing the correct papers, he's reminded of his blackness via the brutality of the policemen,



The last laugh: Omar Sy

and also by his cellmate Victor, a Haitian jailed for 'subversive speech'. This character seems anachronistic, an Aimé Césaire born too early, adding strangeness to a period film that seems overly concerned with historical reconstitution. "You're the negro who gets his ass beat by a white man every night," says Victor (Alex Descas). The encounter will prove decisive for Chocolat, who in the later part of the film will emancipate himself from the white yoke.

By retracing Padilla's dazzling success from provincial circus freak to prestigious theatres, *Chocolat* attempts to rehabilitate a popular figure who has been largely erased from French history books. Despite its exciting subject and the unruly circus world it depicts, the film doesn't take many risks visually. This might be intentional, not wanting to distract from the laudable aim of educating contemporary viewers about the first black star in France. There is nevertheless the somewhat childish pleasure of watching the clowns' beautifully shot and choreographed routines, and the lingering bitterness of a friendship torn apart is powerfully conveyed.

*Chocolat* doesn't subvert the biopic or period film genres, but it does boast a few wonderful moments that make it worth seeking out. **S**

# The Coming War on China

United Kingdom/Australia/USA 2016  
Director: John Pilger

## Reviewed by Michael Brooke

John Pilger's 60th film, almost half a century after *Vietnam: The Quiet Mutiny* (1970), is a sobering four-part sifting of the contemporary and historical evidence that the US is deliberately engineering a potential war with China. As he devotes half its running time to explaining, the US has a long and ignoble history of interfering in the Pacific (part one explores Bikini Atoll nuclear tests, while part three charts various forms of non-violent resistance to US military bases in the eastern Pacific), and a map of current US military bases shows that China is essentially surrounded, with the US in a strong position to facilitate a total trade blockade as well as rain devastation on most of its major cities.

The film offers a fascinating historical overview of US-Chinese relations. Franklin Delano Roosevelt's family fortune came largely from the opium-trading activities of his grandfather Warren Delano. Chinese immigration to the US was banned from 1882, the decade that saw the Statue of Liberty's installation. After Mao Zedong's communist revolution of 1949, US-Chinese relations went into deep freeze, with the State Department not employing any Mandarin speakers throughout the 1950s. But despite relentless propaganda casting Mao as America's arch-enemy, he made several overtures from 1943 into the 1950s: all were rebuffed. According to US-educated entrepreneur Eric Li, the US has an uneasy relationship with a country that appears to be voraciously capitalist (with more dollar billionaires than the US), but in which it is impossible for a capitalist – or a capitalist government – to buy influence.

To American eyes, the Chinese have mutated from turn-of-the-20th-century 'yellow peril' caricature to something more nuanced but equally sinister. According to Pilger, what unsettles US officials is that China's economic dominance is not matched by a militaristic desire for territorial expansion (Pilger judiciously avoids mentioning Tibet, though he doesn't soft-pedal the Chinese government: the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre and the jailed Nobel laureate Liu Xiaobo are discussed in detail). When Pilger asks US State Department official Daniel R. Russel how the US would react if the Chinese were to install a similar number of military bases in the Western Pacific,



A hard rain: *The Coming War on China*

## Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Éric Altmayer  
Nicolas Altmayer  
**Screenplay**  
Cyril Gely  
**Adaptation**  
Olivier Gorce  
Roschdy Zem  
**Cinematography**  
Thomas Letellier  
**Editor**  
Monica Coleman  
**Art Director**  
Jérémie D. Lignol  
**Music**  
Gabriel Yared  
**Sound**  
Brigitte Taillandier  
Vincent Guillon  
Stéphane Thiébaut  
**Costumes**  
Pascaline Chavanne

©Mandarin Cinéma, Gaumont, M6 Films, Korokoro  
**Production Companies**  
Gaumont presents a Mandarin Cinéma production  
A Gaumont, M6 Films, Korokoro co-production  
With the participation

of Canal+, Ciné+, M6  
With the support of Région Île-de-France in partnership with CNC - Centre National de la Cinématographie et de l'Image Animée, Commission Images de la diversité - CNC et CGET/ACSE, CNC - Nouvelles technologies en production  
A film by Roschdy Zem  
A Mandarin Cinéma, Gaumont, M6 Films, Korokoro production

**Cast**  
**Omar Sy**  
Rafael Padilla, 'Chocolat'  
**James Thierrée**  
Georges Footit  
**Clotilde Hesme**  
Marie  
**Olivier Gourmet**  
Ollier  
**Frédéric Pierrot**  
Monsieur Delvaux  
**Noémie Lvovsky**  
Madame Delvaux

**Alice de Lencquesaing**  
Camille Pantoni  
**Alex Descas**  
Victor  
**Olivier Rabourdin**  
Monsieur Gémier

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]  
**Subtitles**

**Distributor**  
Studiocanal Limited

**Northern France, 1897. Cuban former slave Rafael Padilla plays 'Kananga', a cannibal character, in a provincial circus. He meets white British clown George Footit, who is eager to renovate his image and modernise his routines. Footit convinces Padilla to form a duo with him. Padilla is renamed Chocolat. The pair's success leads them to Paris, where they perform at the Nouveau Cirque, drawing large crowds. They both become stars, though Chocolat attracts most of the attention. Now wealthy, he spends his money on cars, gambling and drinking. One day, while signing autographs in the street, he is stopped by police officers asking for his papers. Since he has no documents, he is put in prison, where he is influenced by radical Haitian prisoner Victor.**

After his release, Chocolat becomes increasingly sensitive about the roles that he and Footit perform on stage. He meets his future wife Marie Grimaldi. The relationship between Chocolat and Footit deteriorates. Chocolat wants to overturn the hierarchy between them, and slaps Footit during one of their performances, in front of a shocked audience. The two eventually separate when Chocolat launches a career in the theatre, hoping to be taken seriously as an actor. Playing Othello, he confronts the boos of the audience. As he leaves the theatre, he is beaten up by men to whom he owes money.

In 1917, an ailing Chocolat receives a visit from Footit, who stays beside him until he dies.



the bland riposte is, “We ask ourselves that all the time” – the implication being that the US ‘pivot to Asia’ (of which Russel was a key architect) was designed to prevent the Chinese from doing any such thing.

Made in 2015, the film has already dated in part – an opening voiceover from Hillary Clinton extolling the virtues of American strength is now markedly less sinister, and Pilger understandably says nothing about the prospect of a threatened Donald Trump-engendered protectionist trade war with China. But this may well damage American interests as well: as Eric Li points out, the thing that may ultimately prevent either military or commercial conflict between China and the US is that their economies are symbiotically interlinked to a historically unmatched degree. This at least allows Pilger’s deeply pessimistic film to end on an unexpectedly upbeat note, concluding with a moving tribute to the virtues of people power. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
John Pilger  
**Written by**  
John Pilger  
**Camera**  
Rupert Binsley  
Owen Scurfield  
Bruno Sorrentino  
Joseph Zafar  
**Edited by**  
Joe Frost  
**Original Music**  
Joe Frost  
**Sound**  
Zubin Sarosh  
Giles Khan  
Jouni Elo  
Cooper Seng

©Secret Country  
Films  
**Production Companies**  
Dartmouth Films  
presents  
A John Pilger film  
Produced in  
association with  
SBS-TV Australia  
A film produced  
with the support of  
Bertha Foundation,  
The Reva & David  
Logan Foundation  
A Dartmouth Films  
Production  
**Executive Producer**  
Christopher Hird

presented by  
John Pilger

**In Colour**  
**Part-subtitled**  
[1.78:1]

**Distributor**  
Dartmouth Films

**A documentary, divided into four sections, exploring the notion that the US is deliberately preparing for war with China.**

**‘The Secret of the Marshall Islands’:** the history of the Bikini Atoll nuclear bomb tests and the toll exacted on the islanders in both relocation and radiation poisoning. A comparison is drawn between the Ronald Reagan missile test site in Kwajalein, occupied by well-heeled Americans, and nearby Ebeye, known as ‘the slum of the Pacific’, from which islanders commute by ferry to do menial jobs.

**‘China Rises’:** the history of Chinese-American relations, including the opium source of Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s grandfather’s wealth, the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act that barred Chinese immigration to the US, the 1949 communist revolution under Mao Zedong and the present-day market economy. Writers James Bradley and Zhang Lijia, US-trained entrepreneur Eric Li and former Deng Xiaoping associate Zhang Weiwei explain the striking differences between US and Chinese economic and political systems.

**‘Resistance’:** activism against US military bases on the Japanese island of Okinawa and the South Korean island of Jeju. This section includes a description of an incident in 1962 when missiles were nearly fired at China.

**‘Empire’:** the US has almost 1,000 military bases outside its borders, a significant number essentially surrounding China. This is defended by US government officials Dana Rohrbacher and Daniel R. Russel and adviser Andrew F. Krepinevich; US motives are challenged by historian Bruce Cumings, activist Bruce Gagnon and scientists Ted Postol and Steven Starr. Precedent makes them pessimistic about US intentions.

## The Eagle Huntress

USA 2016  
Director: Otto Bell  
Certificate U 87m 19s

### Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

It has taken the latest advances in camera equipment to allow us a vantage point on a tradition that’s thousands of years old. The modern borders of Mongolia, Kazakhstan and China intersect in and around the Altai mountains, where nomadic peoples have long used specially trained golden eagles to hunt in winter – the eagle handler stands on higher ground, while down in the valley a horse-riding cohort ushers a fox into plain sight. The purposeful interaction of man and bird of prey is remarkable to behold, not least here when director Otto Bell and cameraman Simon Niblett deploy tiny digital cameras on aerial drones to track the eagle in flight, and even have another camera mounted on the huge bird itself. A lightweight crane rig offers a further elevated viewpoint, framing the massive landscape that dwarfs such human endeavour. All of this contributes to a film whose captivating natural beauty and thrilling in-the-moment wildlife action show what it is now possible for even relatively modest independent productions to achieve.

At a moment when digital sleight of hand puts few limits on what filmmakers can generate for themselves, the frissons here remind us that there’s no substitute for seeing the real thing. However, in order to turn skilled reportage into something with a broader cinematic feel, this documentary feature draws heavily on the narrative tropes of the sporting underdog movie, even at the expense of a soupçon of reality. That said, the notion of a cheery 13-year-old Kazakh girl catching and training her own eagle to beat her community’s menfolk at their own game does pretty much outdo *Rocky* in fist-pumping appeal – and with the added attraction of making a genuine statement about female equality in a place still hidebound by conservative patriarchy. It all adds up to the sort of emotionally irresistible, visually striking true story many doc-makers dream of landing upon – and if, as such, it’s virtually a Hollywood crowdpleaser already, then the filmmakers evidently felt justified in filling out the story beats and characterisation to follow a familiar movie format.

So, while significant portions of the film show



**Talon scout: Aisholpan Nurgaiv**

us events that would probably have happened even had the filmmakers not been around to record them, there are certain other scenes that look as if they have been staged to plug gaps in the narrative template: heroine Aisholpan receiving her grizzly old grandpa’s approval, for instance; a wintry detour to seek the advice of a knowledgeable hunter; or the arrangement of sundry elders and esteemed eagle hunters to glower in disapproval at the prospect of this girly upstart. None of this is fatally distracting, but we’re certainly aware that the imperative audience-friendly entertainment value takes occasional precedence over the authenticity of the material.

Elsewhere, though, that authenticity proves unassailable, for even as the underdog saga delivers and then some, so many of the passing asides have the untamed zing of wild reality. The dangerously precarious trapping of the eaglet that father and daughter will train, for instance, involves Aisholpan gingerly edging along a narrow cliff ledge to put a blanket over a ‘baby’ eagle that’s already the size of a large dog, setting us up for later moments when the still-growing bird folds up its six-foot wingspan to perch happily on the little girl’s forearm and let her stroke its tummy feathers. Already there are foreign tourists attending the annual eagle-hunting festival, and you can imagine this lovely film swelling those numbers. Perhaps there are downsides to that, yet at the same time, smiley, humble, go-getting Aisholpan is such an inspiring figure that her empowering story surely belongs to the whole world. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Stacey Reiss  
Sharon Chang  
Otto Bell  
**Based on**  
the life story of  
Nurgaiv Aisholpan  
**Director of Photography**  
Simon Niblett  
**Edited by**  
Pierre Takal  
**Music**

Jingle Punks  
**Sound Recorder**  
Andrew Yarme

©Eagle Huntress LLC  
**Production Companies**  
Sony Pictures  
Classics presents  
in association with  
19340 Productions,  
Artemis Rising  
Foundation, Impact

Partners, Shine Global  
and Warrior Poets  
A Kissiki Film  
and Stacey Reiss  
production  
A Kissiki Film, 19340  
Productions, Stacey  
Reiss Productions  
In association with  
Artemis Rising  
Foundation, Impact  
Partners, Shine  
Global, Warrior Poets

Made with the  
generous support  
of Impact Partners  
Funding provided by  
Sundance Institute  
Documentary  
Film Program  
with support from  
Open Society  
Foundations, Ford  
Foundation JustFilms,  
The Fledgling Fund  
**Executive Producers**

Morgan Spurlock  
Jeremy Chilnick  
Daisy Ridley  
Marc H. Simon  
Dan Cogan  
Regina K. Scully  
Barbara Dobkin  
Susan MacLaury

narrated by  
**Daisy Ridley**

**In Colour**

**[1.85:1]  
Subtitles**

**Distributor**  
Altitude Film  
Entertainment

**A feature documentary unfolding in Mongolia’s Altai mountains, where for centuries the local tribes have used golden eagles to hunt for food and fur. These hunting skills are passed down through the generations, and showcased in an annual eagle-hunting festival, where Nurgaiv and his father have been past medal-winners. However, with no male heir, Nurgaiv puts his faith in his 13-year-old daughter Aisholpan; despite the misgivings of the**

**community elders, he helps her capture an eaglet from its mountain nest and they train it to hunt. The schoolgirl shows natural aptitude, and is the first female to enter the annual festival, much to the annoyance of fellow competitors, who are nonplussed when she wins the contest with the best ever score.**

**With the arrival of winter, Aisholpan becomes a real huntress, as she and her father travel to the mountains and her eagle takes its first fox.**



## Eat That Question Frank Zappa in His Own Words

France/Germany/USA/Sweden 2016

Director: Thorsten Schütte

Certificate 15 93m 23s

### Reviewed by Sam Davies

I'll always remember talking to a friend's father once about the subject of rock 'n' roll, and his shrug as he said, "It's all right I suppose. But *The Rite of Spring* by Stravinsky... There was a riot when that premiered. That's entertainment." Frank Zappa would have agreed with this verdict. Early in *Eat That Question*, assembled by director Thorsten Schütte entirely from the pre-existing stock of Zappa interview footage, the man himself reminisces about the explosive, life-changing excitement of hearing Edgard Varèse for the first time. And the equal thrill of following the long, abstract dialogue carried on by other composers of the early 20th century: Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Webern.

This is not the origin myth of other popular musicians from Zappa's age group: Zappa wasn't working from early, electrifying encounters with Lead Belly EPs or Elvis on a scratchy transistor or flickering black-and-white. And it's significant that in the course of *Eat That Question's* 90-odd minutes (of which he talks for roughly 89), Zappa never has a word to say about his contemporaries, except to mock them. Zappa regarded punk as a travesty and a tragic strangling of a generation's musical potential. "People are just unaccustomed to excellence," is one line he offers to explain the public's fitful enthusiasm for his own elaborate, jagged collages of rock, funk, jazz.

As Schütte's archival digging reveals, Zappa turned to rock after a more academic direction proved a dead end: a 1963 appearance on Steve Allen's talk show to demonstrate his 'Concerto for Two Bicycles' has the house band improvising awkwardly, while Zappa and Allen attack the bikes with violin bows and bare hands. But the 1960s counterculture managed to accommodate Zappa and his group, The Mothers of Invention (just). "I was always a freak, never a hippie," mutters Zappa. Clips from BBC arts shows document Zappa's clashes with the Royal Festival Hall in 1971 (it refused to stage his song suite *200 Motels*) and his return to London in 1983 to



Contrarian: Frank Zappa

record his orchestral works with his own money. One gem of a clip has Zappa being interviewed by an American policeman who's a devoted fan – but also wants Zappa to condemn drug use for all the kids out there watching. Zappa obliges – missing shows because of drug use is a sackable offence in his band – but stresses that, off duty, they can do what they like.

Zappa was fiercely libertarian and pro-free speech – some of the best moments in *Eat That Question* come from his courtroom encounters with Tipper Gore and her efforts in the late 1980s to force parental advisory stickers on to album covers through the PMRC (Parents Music Resource Center). As such he would entirely approve of the uncensored, warts-and-all quality of *Eat That Question*, even, or especially, at the points where it casts him in an ugly light. His homophobia, as captured in queasy lounge-singer parody 'Bobby Brown' or the digs in New Wave parody 'Tinsel Town Rebellion' about "leather groups and plastic groups/and groups that look real queer", has aged terribly.

Like, say, Noel Gallagher or Manic Street Preachers, Zappa is arguably a better interviewee than musician: eloquent, quick and contrarian. Which helps Schütte's film, even if Zappa's music is so often a cold, loveless thicket of disdainful quotation marks, as if he's holding all those genres at arm's length. But from the 1980s onwards, an unexpected warmth creeps into *Eat That Question*. To his own astonishment, Zappa wins a Grammy in 1988 for *Jazz from Hell*, a fiendish suite of computer-composed pieces. And he's welcomed as a national hero in the post-communist Czech Republic, where formerly The Mothers of Invention had been passed around as treasured samizdat bootlegs. "In America, they won't even play this on the radio," he mutters as another song is cued up in front of a club full of adoring fans. But Schütte brings the film full circle as Zappa faces his imminent death from prostate cancer in 1993: the sight of him conducting Varèse's *Ionisation* is a quietly moving demonstration that, for Zappa, in his beginning was his end. **S**

## Endless Poetry

France/Chile 2016

Director: Alejandro Jodorowsky

### Reviewed by Tony Rayns

The first part of Alejandro Jodorowsky's film-autobiography (*La Danza de la Realidad*, 2013) didn't reach British distribution, but this crowd-funded sequel arrives here less than a year after its Cannes premiere, largely because it's sexier and more flamboyant. *Endless Poetry* is essentially 'the Santiago years': it opens with the Jodorowsky family arriving in the city by boat from their former small-town home and closes with the young adult Alejandro leaving for Paris, again by boat. Set mostly in the 1940s and 50s, the action spans young Alejandro's break with his harsh father Jaime and their eventual reconciliation on the eve of his departure; in between Alejandro grows up, mingles with Santiago's bohemian artist circle, dabbles in puppet-theatre and circus clowning and comes to embrace his destiny as an anti-fascist poet. The real-life, elderly Jodorowsky – now looking much more dapper and better groomed than he did before his long lay-off from directing – pops up every so often to reassure his younger self (played by his son Adan) that he's on the right path.

As anarcho-surrealist life stories go this is pretty soft-centred; the auteur has certainly moved on from the time when he was happy to align himself with Arrabal's theatre of cruelty. Although theism and organised religion took some stick in earlier Jodorowsky movies, bourgeois piety barely gets a mention here and there are none of the scorpion stings found in Buñuel's best work. But then Buñuel lived with his Jesuit upbringing all his life, and 2016's Jodorowsky has only the tarot deck to anchor his poetry. We know from his earlier-life cult hits *El Topo* (1970) and *The Holy Mountain* (1973) that Jodorowsky has always had a strong mystical bent, so it probably shouldn't be a surprise to find him born again as a new-ager. Still, the sheer sappiness of much of the action and the reluctance to linger on episodes of pain and loss are, to say the least, unexpected. Explanation is found in an uncredited press-kit interview with Jodorowsky: "I describe my films as 'psychomagic'... To me, an art that does not serve a healing purpose is not art... who is it out to heal? Mainly myself. Secondly, my family. And only in third place, a hypothetical audience."

Someone with first-hand knowledge of Santiago's boho set in the 1940s might take issue with some of the caricatures and episodes in the film, but the only old score that Jodorowsky is clearly trying to settle is with the poet Nicanor Parra, introduced as young Alejandro's culture-hero (he makes a puppet of him as a tribute) but later denounced for selling out to academia: he's shown recommending Alejandro to get a degree and a cushy teaching job with a steady income. Fortunately the young Alejandro is far too busy living in colour in a black-and-white world for such square advice to cramp his style. The streets of Santiago are filled with crowds in identical masks staring blankly at such incidents as the beating-up of a shoplifter, the notionally hip Café Iris is frequented by somnolent deadbeats in grey suits, but our poet-in-the-making takes up with a succession of inspirational chums who (usually by negative example) guide his progress. Foremost among them at

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Estelle Fialon  
**Edited by**  
Willibald  
Wonneberger  
**Sound Mixing**  
Armelé Mahé  
Marc Fragstein

©Les Films du  
Poisson, UFA Fiction,  
ARTE France, SWR  
**Production**  
**Companies**  
Les Films du  
Poisson & UFA  
Fiction present in  
co-production with  
ARTE France, SWR in  
association with The  
Zappa Family Trust

with the support of  
CNC, MFG, Proirep  
ANGOA a film by  
Thorsten Schütte  
Aco-production  
of Les Films du  
Poisson, UFA Fiction,  
Arte France, SWR  
in association  
with SVT  
With the support  
of Centre national  
du cinéma et de  
l'image animée,  
MFG Medien- und  
Filmgesellschaft  
Baden-Württemberg,  
PROCIREP - société  
des producteurs  
& ANGOA  
Produced in

association with The  
Zappa Family Trust  
**Executive**  
**Producers**  
Thorsten Schütte  
Gail Zappa  
Ahmet Zappa

**In Colour**  
[1.33:1]

**Distributor**  
Sony Pictures  
Releasing UK

**A documentary examining the life and work of rock musician and composer Frank Zappa. Using only archive footage of Zappa in interview and in concert, the film documents his career, from his early ambition to follow in the footsteps of his hero Edgard Varèse to his success in the rock counterculture, his battles with censorship in the 1980s and his death in 1993.**





A family affair: Adan Jodorowsky, Brontis Jodorowsky

the outset is the capricious show-off Stella Diaz (played in a crimson wig by Pamela Flores who also – you'll never guess – plays young Alejandro's singing mother), who promises the young man non-penetrative sex and provides him with undreamed-of Orphic ecstasies. But then she gives her virginity to an offscreen mystic and disappears from Alejandro's life and the film, setting a pattern that subsequent chums will follow. The word to define this narrative is 'episodic'.

The one surprise here is the almost complete absence of heterosexual fulfilment, although there's heavy emphasis on young Alejandro's relief at the discovery that he's not gay. (The fear dawned

when his inevitably homophobic dad called him 'Maricón' for reading Lorca.) He later affirms his heterosexuality by nude crowdsurfing across a circus audience, an event which also serves to establish his shift from clownish adolescence to anti-fascist maturity. Most of the film is as shallow and silly as it sounds, but it's rarely boring and it generally looks quite vibrant; it's Chris Doyle's most prestigious cinematography gig since the break with Wong Kar Wai, and he rises to the occasion with brash, carnivalesque images. The visual effects have an agreeably non-industrial magic to them, particularly in the unfurling of huge old photographs over tacky shopfronts to represent a street's former magnificence. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Alejandro Jodorowsky  
Moises Cosio  
Abbas Nokhasteh  
Takashi Asai  
**Written by**  
Alejandro Jodorowsky  
**Director of Photography**  
Christopher Doyle  
**Editor**  
Maryline Monthieux  
**Production Designer**  
Alejandro Jodorowsky  
**Original Music**  
Adan Jodorowsky  
**Sound Mixers**

Jean-Paul Hurier  
Benjamin Viau  
**Costume Designer**  
Pacale Montandon-Jodorowsky  
@Satori Films,  
Le Soleil Films  
and Le Pacte  
**Production Companies**  
Satori Films, Le  
Soleil Films and Le  
Pacte in association  
with Detalle Films,  
Opvizor and  
Uplink co-present

a film written and  
directed by Alejandro  
Jodorowsky  
With the participation  
of Aide aux cinémas  
du monde, Centre  
national du cinéma  
et de l'image animée,  
Ministère des  
Affaires étrangères  
et du Développement  
international,  
Institut Français,  
Consejo Nacional  
de la Cultura y las  
Artes – Gobierno de  
Chile, I.Municipalidad

de Tocopilla  
**Executive Producer**  
Xavier Guerrero  
Yamamoto

**Cast**  
**Adan Jodorowsky**  
Alejandro  
**Pamela Flores**  
Sara/Stella Diaz  
**Brontis Jodorowsky**  
Jaime  
**Leandro Taub**  
Enrique Lihn  
**Jeremias Herkovits**  
Alejandro as a boy

**Alejandro Jodorowsky**  
old Alejandro  
**Carolyn Carson**  
Maria Lefevre  
**Adonis**  
Andres Racz  
**Julia Avendaño**  
Pequeñita, little girl  
**Bastian Bodenhofer**  
General Carlos  
Ibáñez del Campo

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]  
Subtitles

**Distributor**  
Curzon Artificial Eye

French/Chilean  
theatrical title  
**Poesía sin fin**

Santiago, the 1930s. Jaime Jodorowsky brings his wife Sara and young son Alejandro to the city from Tocopilla and opens a shop in a working-class district. Alejandro angers his strict father by preferring poetry to science and one day outrages relatives and friends by attacking a garden tree with an axe. His gay cousin Ricardo introduces him to artists Carmen and Veronica Cerecedas and he quickly grows to young adulthood under their tutelage, returning to his parents' home only to steal money. In Café Iris he meets eccentric, red-haired artist Stella Diaz, who first gives him the run-around but then becomes his muse and introduces him to his culture-hero, poet Nicanor Parra. Alejandro finds Ricardo hanging from a lamppost. Stella gives her

virginity to a mystic and Alejandro breaks with her. He inherits a studio space from emigrating artist André and at its housewarming party meets poet Enrique Lihn, who becomes his closest friend. Enrique forms a turbulent relationship with the dwarf Pequeñita; after being rescued from suicide by Alejandro she undergoes ECT to remove Enrique from her mind and meets a new mate her own size. Alejandro begins to discover his true identity by performing as a poet-clown in a circus. When the fascist Ibanez comes to power, Alejandro mounts a protest and decides to leave for Paris. He has a parting reconciliation with his father (now destitute, after the shop burned down) on the quay and leaves on a boat, accompanied by an angel of death.

## Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them

USA/United Kingdom 2016, Director: David Yates  
Certificate 12A 132m 40s

### Reviewed by Kim Newman

Having seen the seven-book/eight-film Harry Potter saga to its conclusion, J.K. Rowling and Warner Brothers were unable to resist returning to the well and here kick off a prequel series. Rowling's book *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (whose proceeds mostly go to charity) is not a novel but a whimsical bestiary – purporting to be one of Harry's annotated Hogwarts textbooks. This film script (Rowling's first) is essentially a screen original, furthering the creatrix's expansion into other media (which also includes co-authoring a one-generation-on stage sequel, *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*).

There are a few tiny continuity elements – tousle-haired Newt has been expelled from Hogwarts but was evidently an earlier favourite pupil of headmaster Albus Dumbledore, and his new romance is complicated by a prior entanglement with an ancestor of supporting Potter villain Bellatrix Lestrange – but this not only goes back in time to explore more of the history of Rowling's universe but relocates it to a surprisingly grey, Prohibition-era New York City. Here, the faintly infuriating Jim Dale-ish English clod-hero runs up against a ripe selection of Yank stereotypes: a cheery Oliver Hardy-shaped baker (Dan Fogler), carried along for the wild ride after his case of doughnut samples becomes mixed up with Newt's portable Tardis of monsters; a cigar-chomping speakeasy-proprietor gnome (Ron Perlman – his presence a reminder that Guillermo del Toro marked out some of this territory in 2008 in *Hellboy II: The Golden Army*) who packs his wand in a shoulder holster; a dizzy telepathic flapper (Alison Sudohl) whose squeaky voice evokes 1920s singer Helen Kane, inspiration for the cartoon character Betty Boop; a Citizen Kane-like press baron (Jon Voight) with political connections, barely present in this plot but liable to be a grudge-holding major antagonist in sequels; an anti-magic campaigner/abuser of orphans (Samantha Morton), who combines the puritanical witch-hunting zeal of Cotton Mather with the saloon-smashing no-fun ethos that led to Prohibition; and a nattily dressed FBI type (Colin Farrell) with a severe short-back-and-sides who – in a faint echo of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* – is only a placeholder for a major villain to come (Johnny Depp, swivel-eyed like a blond Peter Lorre).

With dependable David Yates – who handled the wind-up of the Potter series – back on board, and the now-mandatory showstopping effects (a touch less magical, it has to be said, than the more visionary sorcery in New-York of *Doctor Strange*), this seems to aim for acceptable rather than outstanding. Its actual plot, which focuses on Credence (an agonised Ezra Miller, looking like Walerian Borowczyk's Mr Hyde) and his djinn-like tortured spirit, takes a backseat to non sequitur japes with well-realised beasts who dash about doing not terribly uproarious slapstick (a duck-billed kleptomaniac marsupial keeps making Newt look like a master crook, a glowing-snouted rhino mutant wants to mate and isn't too choosy what species it couples with).

It remains tricky to spin a film – let alone a series – out of a non-narrative book, and Rowling and Yates fall back on soap-like tricks (a romance poised to blossom, an as yet unrevealed master-villain



## Generation Revolution

United Kingdom 2016

Directors: Cassie Quarless, Usayd Younis



Master of disaster: Eddie Redmayne

scheme) to set gears in motion. It's spectacular and promising, though at first exposure its characters (human and otherwise) are often as grating as charming, with Eddie Redmayne and Katherine Waterston relatively new to blockbuster material after eye-catching work in more challenging, less-seen drama and not yet entirely comfortable running goggle-eyed after billion-pixel mythical creatures and continuing franchise glory. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

David Heyman  
J.K. Rowling  
Steve Kloves  
Lionel Wigram

#### Written by

J.K. Rowling

#### Director of Photography

Philippe Rousselot

#### Edited by

Mark Day

#### Production Designer

Stuart Craig

#### Music

James Newton Howard

#### Sound Designer/Supervising

Glenn Freemantle

#### Costume Designer

Colleen Atwood

#### Stunt Co-ordinator

Enice Huthart

#### Visual Effects

Framestore

Double Negative

MPC

Rodeo FX

Method Studios

#### Image Engine

Cinesite

Milk Visual Effects

Secret Lab

@Warner Bros.

Entertainment Inc.

#### Production Companies

A Warner Bros. Pictures

presentation

A Heyday Films

production

A David Yates film

#### Executive Producers

Tim Lewis

Neil Blair

Rick Senat

#### Cast

Eddie Redmayne

Newton Scamander,

'Newt'

Katherine

Waterston

Porpentina

Goldstein, 'Tina'

Dan Fogler

Jacob Kowalski

#### Alison Sudol

Queenie Goldstein

Ezra Miller

Credence Barebone

Samantha Morton

Mary Lou

Jon Voight

Henry Shaw Sr

Carmen Ejogo

Seraphina Picquery

Colin Farrell

Percival Graves

#### Dolby Digital Colour and Prints by

Technicolor

[2.35:1]

#### Some screenings presented in 3D

#### Distributor

Warner Bros.

Pictures

International (UK)

### Reviewed by Leigh Singer

With a title signalling aspiration more than state-of-the-nation, this lo-fi documentary is an energised and often effective look at street-level activism, one that seeks to dispel some of the age-old clichés about minority youth's lackadaisical interaction with the wider world. Following two groups, the London Black Revolutionaries and R Movement, through five passionate young people determined to drive social change and challenge injustice, the film offers a powerful corrective – but perhaps synchronises all too perfectly with its subject: while there's no shortage of indignant outrage or inspiring vigour, there's also a tendency to get bogged down in contradiction and naivety.

Where the film unequivocally succeeds is in highlighting – indeed, in forcing us to acknowledge – the DIY movements that are essential for jumpstarting staid or stalling infrastructures, whether socioeconomic or creative. In a Brexit landscape of uncertainty, where short-term (and possibly longer-lasting) austerity continues to bear down disproportionately on those at the bottom, education and mobilisation must come from within communities, regardless of ethnic background. And arts industries that are still overwhelmingly male, middle-class and white

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Producers

Cassie Quarless

Usayd Younis

#### Editors

Nse Asuquo

Richard Guard

#### Composers

Wayne Roberts

Pete Cannon

#### Sound Editor

Simon Haupt

@Generation

Revolution Ltd./The

British Film Institute

#### Production Companies

A black & brown film

by Cassie and Usayd

Supporters:

Lush, The Lipban

Miliband Trust,

Edge Fund, Barry

Amiel & Normal

Melburn Trust,

Network for

Social Change

Made with the

support of the

BFI's Film Fund

#### Consulting Executive Producer

Derren Lawford

#### Executive

#### Producers

Ashitey Akomfrah

Mehrunisha

Suleman

Ameenah Allen

#### With

Bhanisha Parmar

voiceover artist

#### In Colour

[1.78:1]

#### Distributor

black & brown

A documentary, shot over two years, following five London-based activists fighting for the rights of brown and black people, primarily through two organisations: militant protesters the London Black Revolutionaries and R Movement, which favours a community advice and outreach service. LBR founder Arnie and his cohort Josh organise a 'die-in' at Westfield shopping centre, during which 76 people are arrested. Fellow LBR members Alex, originally from France, and Tej go along with the plan but Tej in particular is unhappy with Arnie's willingness to incite violence, as with a Brixton anti-gentrification rally that goes awry in a police station confrontation.

R Movement's Tay is more concerned with educating young black men on their rights if they fall foul of police stop-and-search or other intimidating tactics, as well as providing aid parcels for local homeless people. After the Brixton incident and Arnie's subsequent 'Fuck the Tories' march, the LBR members challenge his methods. Arnie responds by expelling those who are against him, effectively causing the LBR to collapse. Months later, Tej is questioning her approach to these issues, whereas Alex, Josh, Tay and other activists have combined their efforts with the umbrella Black Lives Matter UK movement, to continue their quest to disrupt and challenge what they see as institutional racism and exploitation. Josh remains adamant that their struggle will prevail.



Guerrilla style: *Generation Revolution*

(despite some welcome recent initiatives) can be challenged by the sheer proliferation of ways of documenting activity. From #ReclaimBrixton to reclaiming a cultural narrative: the revolution may not always be televised, but it can be recorded, streamed or uploaded and can therefore find an audience.

Directors/producers Usayd Younis and Cassie Quarless's immersive, guerrilla-style shooting – Quarless, detained at the Black Revs' Westfield shopping centre 'die-in', is now suing the police for wrongful arrest – turns potential technical shortcomings to the film's advantage, aligning viewers with its engaging underdog characters, who are all cannily chosen to offer varied interpretations of revolution. Good-natured teen Tay seems as eager a student as he is a leader; Black Rev founder Arnie and the committed Josh are hardline firebrands; and the more measured, articulate Tej yearns for a more inclusive approach.

Some of the best scenes occur when these people are forced to defend their stance to each other, as in Arnie and Tej's autopsy of a violent – and, frankly, confusingly presented – Brixton police station sortie. Yet despite the filmmakers' regular off-camera interjections, they fail to tackle the hints of class resentment (a subject Shola Amoo recently addressed to telling effect in *A Moving Image*) that we see in Arnie, and neglect to probe further. Likewise, when Josh refuses to engage with a senior policeman at a Westminster sit-in, since "what your uniform represents is savagery", his instant judgement of an individual as the agent of a dangerous 'other' is surely the selfsame mass discrimination he's protesting against. But this too passes without comment.

The LBR's ultimate implosion does elicit some necessary, even courageous self-reflection from participants and filmmakers alike. Alongside *Generation Revolution's* urgent call to arms and determination to show a misrepresented diaspora in a new light, its conclusions – and lack of them – points to "the bigger picture" that Tej cites. Josh's wide-eyed bemusement that a protest movement can succumb to the same tensions and schisms that blight the corridors of power reveals how cyclical and universal so many of our struggles are. **S**

New York, 1926. English wizard Newt Scamander arrives with a suitcase/pocket universe containing magical creatures he is preserving; he is intent on returning a giant eagle stolen from its Arizona home. Some creatures escape from his suitcase and cause mischief, which draws the attention of ex-investigator Tina Goldstein. She has been demoted by the Magical Congress of the United States for attacking Mary Lou Barebone, leader of a witch-hunt movement, risking public exposure of the magic world. Percival Graves, Tina's former boss, investigates damage caused by an invisible magic creature that Tina initially believes to be an escapee from Newt's suitcase but which is in fact an 'obscure', an uncontrollable spirit created when a witch or wizard represses their magical abilities. Credence, Mary Lou's abused adopted son, is responsible for the obscure, which ravages the city, murdering Mary Lou, until Newt talks him down. Graves destroys Credence and turns out to be rogue wizard Grindelwald in disguise. It seems that the secret of magic is exposed, but Newt prevails on the eagle to disperse an elixir of forgetfulness in the rain falling on the city. Newt leaves Tina and boards a ship for home.



## Half Way

United Kingdom 2016  
Director: Daisy-May Hudson

### Reviewed by Jasper Sharp

"In a situation where I felt completely powerless, the camera was the only thing I felt I could really control, so I began filming to try and take some of that power back." So says Daisy-May Hudson at the beginning of her film *Half Way*, over a montage of family snaps depicting a happy upbringing in the Epping home where her now 13-year-old sister Bronte was born. It is the only real instance of an explicit authorial voice in a there-but-for-the-grace-of-God-go-I first-person account of more than a year of rootlessness that is sure to touch a raw nerve with *Generation Rent*. Aside from the opening footage of her graduation from the University of Manchester, Hudson remains conspicuously off-camera as she returns 'home' just after landlord Tesco serves a compulsory eviction notice on her single mother Beverley and, priced out of the soaring local rental market, the family are put on the waiting list for social housing. We see Daisy-May only fleetingly, reflected in the mirrors or windows of the temporary havens in which they are ignominiously rehoused, though with her story unfolding through her interactions with her mother and sister, it is never in doubt that their plight is a shared one.

Hudson's low-key approach demonstrates a keen eye for subtle observational details within this close family dynamic. In the cramped shared hostel that affords the mother and daughters an initial six-week stopgap, a television in the background runs a trailer for the Channel 4 documentary *How to Get a Council House*, while the other residents crash about in the communal



*Half Way*

corridors late at night. Local youths loiter in the darkness beyond the pebble-dashed purgatory of the family's subsequent abode in Hemnall House, a forbidding set of apartments concealed by trees from public view and in a severe state of disrepair, despite Beverley paying more than £500 a month in rent and council tax. A friend's generous offer to let them spend Christmas week housesitting offers a respite from the rudely furnished, oppressively beige interiors of their makeshift domestic set-up, though a scene of Beverley back home, taking down the cards once the festive season is over, signals a return to a bleak reality. The appearance of snowdrops in January promises a false glimmer of hope, as the offer comes through of a flat on an estate in Chigwell; when Beverley rejects it on the grounds that it is miles away from Bronte's school, an eviction notice from the council provides a shock reminder that even this stark existence is a precarious one.

In articulating her mother's mounting sense of despair in the face of council bureaucracy, manifested by the sporadic arrival of impersonal computer-generated letters and emails, Hudson's focus seldom strays beyond the four walls of the shared space to which the three return after their respective days at work or school, adding to the sense of restless claustrophobia that pervades every moment of their waking life. What the two adult members of the household do for a living is never expressly stated (though in one sequence we see Beverley driving to her workplace and, according to the film's website, Daisy-May was working as a production assistant at Vice Media). This strategy of keeping the political personal seems justifiable given the stigma attached to homelessness. Since the film's completion, the director has been active in drawing attention to Britain's hidden homeless problem, and has revealed that Bronte was too ashamed to admit her family's dispossessed status to her schoolmates. *Half Way* reveals the real shame of London's housing crisis, which sees even those working full-time struggling to keep a roof over their heads. Ⓔ

## The Heritage of Love

Russian Federation, United Kingdom 2016  
Director: Yuriy Vasil'yev

### Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

A box-office hit in Russia this year, *The Heritage of Love* stars heartthrob singer Dima Bilan in a romance that awkwardly straddles a century of history, crosscutting between St Petersburg in World War I and Paris in the present day. Bilan, who represented Russia twice in the Eurovision Song Contest, winning in 2008, makes his feature-film debut in a dual role. In the 21st-century storyline he is Andrey, a mechanic, visiting Paris to swindle an exiled Russian aristocrat out of a fair price for her vintage car, and falling for a mysterious Parisian woman (Svetlana Ivanova). Back in World War I, he is Andrey, a well-born officer who falls for Vera, a young duchess (Ivanova, naturally), but is separated from her by the conflict.

The film's narrative magic inevitably reveals that one Andrey is descended from the other, and that the Paris *femme* is similarly connected to the duchess, via her sister's post-war love match with an aristocrat. Before the modern-day couple are united in a restored St Petersburg mansion, the immaculate, white-painted site of their ancestors' first chaste encounter, their forebears must negotiate a revolution and its consequences.

To evoke the turmoil of the time, we are shown a brief night of unrest at the mansion: peasants storm in and smash the chandeliers, Vera does duty as a field nurse, and there is a bracing grey-toned battle scene featuring several horses, explosions and lots of icy water. However, despite its mostly historical setting, the film is light on politics and violence, concentrating instead on moments of impetuous youthful passion – always curtailed, and strictly in picturesque settings. Love will triumph, but only after 100 years of yearning, as will the lovers' aristocratic blood. The film comes to the cosy conclusion that the ruling classes are truly noble but that grasping capitalism has a lot to answer for. Even so, an entirely laudable note at the end of the film expresses gratitude to the European countries that took in Russian migrants following the revolution and expresses hope that such a welcome "will also be granted to those who today face a similar fate".

Almost all the actors are on double duty, and it's mildly amusing to see them pop up, with a sympathetic new persona, in a different era: the ambitious businessman is reborn in a new



Mine's a double: Dima Bilan

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Alice Hughes Claire O'Neill Thea Paulett	Luke Shrewsbury	Jackie McCarten David Butler
<b>Executive Produced by</b> Daisy-May Hudson	<b>Production Company</b> Beehive Films	<b>In Colour</b> [1.78:1]
<b>Edited by</b> Vera Simmonds	<b>Executive Producers</b> Bob White Jackie White	<b>Distributor</b> Beehive Films
<b>Music</b> James William Blades	<b>Producers</b> Jean Edwards Andrew Hale Stephanie Hale	
<b>Sound Designed by</b>		

**A documentary by Daisy-May Hudson chronicling more than a year spent living in temporary accommodation with her single mother Beverley and teenage sister Bronte. Forced from their home of 13 years after their landlord decides to sell, and unable to afford the inflated rental prices in their Epping neighbourhood, the family are put on a council-housing waiting list. In July 2013, following Daisy-May's graduation from Manchester University, they move to Norway House, Epping Forest District Council's homeless persons' hostel in North Weald, moving six weeks later to a temporary flat in Hemnall House. Over the coming months, they wait for news of a more permanent residence from the council. After 26 weeks, on 8 January 2014, Beverley is offered a property in Chigwell, but turns it down because of its distance from Bronte's school. On 4 March she receives a letter from the council informing her that because of her refusal, they are to be evicted from Hemnall House within 21 days. With nowhere else to go, they apply for legal aid to appeal the decision. They subsequently learn that the council has decided not to go to court and is offering them another property. On 18 October, they finally move to their new home.**



# I Am Bolt

United Kingdom 2016  
Directors: Benjamin Turner, Gabe Turner

## Reviewed by Geoffrey Macnab

"No one in the history of humanity has run as fast as Usain Bolt," we are told at the beginning of this amiable but hagiographical documentary about the record-breaking Jamaican sprinter. Directors Benjamin and Gabe Turner do an efficient enough job in taking us through the key staging posts in Bolt's career, but have very little critical distance from their subject. They don't try to put his achievements in context or analyse the reasons behind his phenomenal popularity.

The timeframe is jarring. The film starts in 2015 with a nervous and not fully fit Bolt preparing to race at the Beijing World Championships. One of the most likeable elements here is the way the film contrasts Bolt in his private moments with the athlete the world sees on the track. Bolt keeps his own video diary, and we see engagingly banal and comic sequences showing him doing his own ironing or goofing around in his hotel room. The filmmakers intersperse footage of his races with interviews in which his friends and manager ponder just what drives him; his parents are featured fleetingly, and he talks briefly about his childhood.

Bolt's coach Glen Mills is a wryly humorous figure who can't help but put you in mind of Ian Holm's Sam Mussabini in *Chariots of Fire* (1981). Armed with his stopwatch, Mills stands by the side of the track as Bolt trains, running with huge weights attached to slow him down. He is even-tempered and philosophical, telling us that "the journey" for an athlete is more important than "the destination". That, of course, isn't Bolt's opinion at all. He is very concerned with his legacy and is absolutely desperate to win, especially when he is being taunted by rivals such as the American Justin Gatlin, or being challenged by young pretenders like his fellow Jamaican Yohan Blake. At the same time, he is gregarious and hedonistic. "The older you get, you can't party as much," he says, reflecting on the sacrifices he has to make to pursue gold for the final time



Fast times: Usain Bolt

at the Rio Olympics. Subjecting himself to yet another ice bath, or pumping weights, he talks about his desire to just go on holiday, eat some junk food or indulge his passion for quad biking.

The filmmakers don't attempt to explore what Bolt's Jamaican identity means to him. He is at least as well known as Bob Marley once was but seems to share little of the reggae star's political consciousness. His achievements are celebrated all over Jamaica, and there are scenes here of drivers and passers-by high-fiving him, delighted simply to catch sight of him. He talks about how much it meant to him to win in the World Junior Championships as a teenager in front of a Jamaican crowd but, beyond that, the film reveals little about his background or why Jamaican sprinting is so strong. Nor does the documentary address the doping scandals that have dogged athletics. (There are passing references to Gatlin's failed drug tests but nothing beyond that.)

This is a strangely unfocused film that comes at its subject from many different directions. At times, it's like a promotional movie made on behalf of one of the big sports clothing brands. That said, it does offer glimpses into the athlete's life that you will never find in conventional sports documentaries; and the races themselves are often shown from unusual perspectives – we see coach Mills hidden away on the sidelines, or watch the sprinters from behind as they disappear into the distance.

One mystery the documentary can't really penetrate is what drives him. When he isn't competing, Bolt is relaxed and easygoing, but in the build-up to championships he pushes himself to absolute extremes, training with a ferocious intensity that will often make him physically sick. He exults in his victories, too. There is no false modesty about him.

"For some reason, when he steps on the line, you feel you are running with him," one interviewee observes. It's true. Everyone roots for him. Presidents and celebrities copy his bow-and-arrow celebrations. No one wants him to lose. He is that rare example of a sporting hero with a completely untarnished legacy. When the race mattered, he always won. The film hints at the enormous pressure he was often under to protect his Olympic record. What it doesn't reveal is just how or why he became the fastest man in history. Ⓢ

## Credits and Synopsis

<b>Producers</b> Elmira Aynulova Natalia Doroshkevich Maria Zhuromska	Community, Cultural Solidarity Media <b>Executive Producer</b> Maria Mikhaylova	Countess Zubtsova <b>Lilila Ozolinya</b> Yelizaveta Yezerskaya von Lieven <b>Aleksandr Vasil'yev</b> historical fashion expert <b>Aleksandr Golovin</b> Repnin <b>Petar Zekaviza</b> Mikhailenko
<b>Screenplay</b> Olga Pogodina Natalia Doroshkevich <b>Director of Photography</b> Ramunas Greychius <b>Supervising Editors</b> Irakli Kvirikadze Alexander Amirov <b>Art Director</b> Jurgita Gerdvilayte <b>Composer</b> Eduard Artemyev <b>Sound</b> Sergey Bubenko Vadim Rudobelets <b>Costume Designer</b> Gulnara Shakhmillova	<b>Cast</b> <b>Dima Bilan</b> Captain Andrey Dolmatov/ Andrey Kulikov <b>Svetlana Ivanova</b> Princess Vera Chernusheva/ Vera Yezerskaya <b>Aleksandr Baluyev</b> Tereshenko <b>Jurgita Jurkute</b> Countess Irina <b>Marat Basharov</b> Baron von Lieven <b>Julia Peresild</b> Masha <b>Alexandr Dashabayan</b> Lev Chij <b>Victor Nemez</b> Yefim <b>Vladislav Vetrov</b> Count Chernushev <b>Tatyana Lyutayeva</b> Duchess Chernusheva <b>Svetlana Polyakova</b>	<b>Dolby Atmos In Colour</b> [2.35:1] <b>Subtitles</b>  <b>Distributor</b> Cultural Solidarity Media/Miracle  Russian theatrical title <b>Geroy</b>

The film intertwines stories from WWI Russia and the present day.

In 2016, mechanic Andrey is hired to help a friend purchase an antique car for an unfair price from a Russian princess living in Paris. On his arrival, he meets a beautiful woman and sees a face similar to hers on a Russian grave. At first he goes along with the deal, but changes his mind and tells the princess the truth when he learns about her plans to renovate her old home. He searches for the woman he met earlier, but just misses her.

In 1914, Captain Andrey and his fellow army officers visit the Chernusheva family home near St Petersburg. Andrey and one of the daughters, Vera, fall in love. The declaration of war divides them, and the 1917 revolution displaces the Chernushevas. Andrey saves a family of merchants from revolutionary thugs, and when he survives a firing squad he is nursed by their daughter. They have sex while he is thinking of Vera. Andrey and Vera meet once more before they are both killed.

In 2016, with the car restored and returned to the renovated mansion, the princess explains to Andrey that the older Andrey was his great-grandfather, and introduces him to her granddaughter, the woman from Paris. They embrace, the doubles of their ancestors Andrey and Vera.

## Credits and Synopsis

<b>Producer</b> Leo Pearlman <b>Director of Photography</b> Patrick Smith <b>Editor</b> Paul Monaghan <b>Original Music</b> Ian Arber <b>Sound Supervisor</b> Mark Atkinson	©Fulwell 73 Ltd <b>Production Companies</b> Produced by Fulwell 73 in association with Doyen Global <b>Executive Producers</b> Matthew Kay Simon Oliveira Ricky Simms	Nugent Walker  <b>In Colour</b> [1.78:1]  <b>Distributor</b> Picturehouse Entertainment
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A biographical documentary about three-time Olympic sprint champion Usain Bolt. The film begins in China in 2015 with Bolt preparing to compete in the World Championships against his rival Justin Gatlin. It then heads back in time, telling the story of how the Jamaican athlete won three gold medals (for the 100m, 200m and 4x100m relay) at the 2008 Olympics in Beijing and recreated the feat in 2012 in London and again in Rio in 2016. There is footage of Bolt training in Jamaica with his coach Glen Mills and of him relaxing with family and friends. The film also includes interviews with some of Bolt's admirers, among them Brazilian football legend Pelé and tennis star Serena Williams. The final part of the film concentrates on Bolt's efforts to overcome injury and motivate himself to compete at the Rio games.



## The Incident

United Kingdom 2015  
Director: Jane Linfoot  
Certificate 15 94m 10s

### Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

At least two pivotal 'incidents' occur over the slight course of Jane Linfoot's Yorkshire-set debut feature, yet it's an opening transgression that has the gravest significance for what follows. Waiting for a takeaway in his car, well-heeled young architect Joe (Tom Hughes) is chatted up by Lily (Tasha Connor), a wayward, disaffected teenager who turns tricks in the local area. Joe pays Lily for the resulting sexual transaction, then returns, cold pizza in hand, to the striking woodland retreat he shares with his art-dealer wife Annabel (Ruta Gedmintas). It's soon clear that this is a marriage already showing strain, as a botched al fresco seduction attempt later underlines. When Lily inconveniently refuses to fade back into anonymity, what transpires is a thinly sketched bourgeois nightmare, as an insecure have-not wreaks random havoc in the lives of a couple who seemingly have everything.

Linfoot's Bafta-nominated short *Sea View* (2013) also dealt with the repercussions of an illicit tryst between a vulnerable teenager and an older man. Though *The Incident's* wispy equivalent labours to sustain itself across a significantly overextended 94 minutes, it does offer one or two sequences that possess a wozy, oneiric pull. Its centrepiece is a protracted, wordless passage in which the angular spaces of the wealthy couple's stylish but sterile home – all glass panels and fastidious furnishings – are exploited to mildly unnerving effect. Prior to this, Lily – after crossing paths with Annabel while servicing a client in some public toilets – impulsively decides to follow the older woman home through the woods. After getting drunk on champagne that's been stored in the garage for Annabel's upcoming exhibition opening, Lily sneaks into the house late at night, wandering through the rooms and examining the abundant *objets* therein. Finally, she pulls a stocking over her face and surprises the sleeping Annabel in her bedroom, before fleeing in confusion.


What's intriguing about the scene is how it plays with and subverts slasher/home-invasion mechanics, creating instead something pregnant with ambiguity. Throughout, Lily is depicted as someone who, while outwardly stoical, is desperately in search of an identity – an earlier



What lies without?: Ruta Gedmintas

non sequitur of a scene sees her listlessly burning paper towels as if to suggest a self-destructive drive. But Linfoot's minimalist approach to character keeps her motivations vague – there's a lack of substantial insight other than the suggestion of the vastly contrasting social spheres that Lily and Annabel/Joe inhabit.

Linfoot certainly seems more at ease with the film's more expressionist touches, as opposed to the rather airless and stilted dialogue-driven segments elsewhere. Her precise approach to framing and screen space – augmented by the cool palette employed by DP Pau Castejón Ubeda – echoes that of both Michael Haneke and Joanna Hogg, while the ambient score by Canadian drone artist Tim Hecker provides a suitably brooding, if sometimes overly portentous, aural underpinning.

Despite her character's underwritten nature, Connor makes a strong impression as Lily – it's something of a pity that she becomes a rather peripheral presence in the film's later stages, with the focus shifting more to the fracturing relationship of Joe and Annabel. These two aren't altogether convincing from the outset; then again, that may be the point – Lily being the earthy contaminant to their somewhat artificial domestic set-up. As the newly expectant Annabel, Gedmintas ably conveys her increasing agitation and the unspoken suspicion that something darker lies behind Lily's twilight trespass. That the film's exploration of this is ultimately flimsy and overstretched is frustrating. At the same time, Linfoot's evident feel for texture and mood augurs well for future projects. 

## Jet Trash

United Kingdom 2015  
Director: Charles Henri Belleville  
Certificate 15 84m 49s

### Reviewed by Lisa Mullen

Based on a 1998 novel, *Go*, by co-screenwriter Simon Lewis, this trouble-in-paradise yarn has a period feel – but the question is, do we need a revival of the sunburnt gothicism that was so magisterially defined by turn-of-the-century classics like Danny Boyle's *The Beach* and Jonathan Glazer's *Sexy Beast*? *Jet Trash* is nice to look at, but it doesn't get close to either of those films in terms of the range or acuity of its ideas, despite working on a similar premise by staging the return of a repressed horror in the midst of a sun-drenched fantasy of ease and plenty.

In this case, the rough beast on the horizon is the grim backstory that has brought two young beach bums, Lee (Robert Sheehan) and Sol (Osy Ikhile), to the beautiful shoreline of Goa on Christmas Eve. On the surface they are all about the drugs, girls, parties and banter; in reality, they are constantly looking over their shoulder for Marlowe (Craig Parkinson), the evil London gangster who is out to get them. A series of murky flashbacks reveals a dastardly human-trafficking scheme that went awry and put them in conflict with their sometime employer: now Marlowe's sole purpose in life is to find them and exact his revenge.

The precise details of this criminal scenario remain somewhat sketchy, and this is not the only narrative element where the audience will have to stretch to fill the gaps; a subplot about Lee and Sol's would-be Buddhist landlord Mike (Jasper Pääkkönen) never begins to make sense, while stray references to Lee's dead twin brother appear to be remnants of an earlier script revision. The film works best when it puts aside its pretensions to greater depth and focuses instead on delivering cheeky entertainment, especially in the scenes between Lee and Sol, who exhibit an easy chemistry that makes them likeable despite their idiotic decisions. Sheehan and Ikhile play off each other beautifully, with the shrewd and careful Sol fully aware that his mate is a flaky chancer, yet somehow helpless to resist his puppy-eyed charm.

In contrast, the female lead, Sofia Boutella, who plays Lee's girlfriend Vix, has to make what she can of the usual sex-object-in-peril



Beached males: Raj Zutshi

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Caroline Cooper  
Charles  
Sarada McDermott

**Written by**  
Jane Linfoot  
**Director of**  
Photography

Pau Castejón Ubeda

**Editor**

Matthew McKinnon

**Production Designer**

Byron Broadbent

**Original Music**

Tim Hecker

**Sound Recordist**

Phil Cape

**Costume Designer**

Holly Rebecca

©Wild Bobcat

Limited & British

Film Institute

**Production Companies**  
BFI presents in association with  
Creativity Capital  
a Universal Spirits  
and Square Circle  
Films production  
A Jane Linfoot film  
Made with the  
support of the  
BFI's Film Fund  
**Executive Producers**  
Lizzie Francke  
Christopher Collins  
Patrick Fischer  
Richard Kondal

**Cast**  
**Ruta Gedmintas**  
Annabel  
**Tom Hughes**

Joe  
Tasha Connor  
Lily

**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Verve Pictures

Yorkshire, present day. A wealthy young couple – architect Joe and art dealer Annabel – stay at their rural second home while Annabel prepares for an onsite exhibition. While waiting for a takeaway in town, Joe is solicited by teenager Lily, whom he pays for sex. Annabel and Lily cross paths when Annabel sees Lily leaving some public toilets with a client. Annabel discovers that she's pregnant. Lily follows Annabel home one day; she hides in the garage and gets drunk on champagne that's being stored there for Annabel's upcoming exhibition opening. That night, Lily enters the house, surprising the sleeping Annabel before fleeing. Traumatized, Annabel pleads with Joe to sell the house. When Lily is charged, Joe tries to prevent Annabel from attending a victim-offender mediation. Annabel goes anyway, but leaves the session in distress when it becomes evident that Lily had been in the car with Joe. The exhibition goes ahead, but Annabel and Joe's marriage appears to have an uncertain future.



stuff, while Adelayo Adedayo is wasted as the trafficked Adeze, who remains a largely mute victim. These underwritten women are symptomatic of a film that can't bring itself to look unflinchingly at the complexities of its characters' predicament – a major problem when you're aiming for the heart-of-darkness trope. Likewise, India itself is reduced to a set of clichés, despite the Indian co-production credit and an eye-catching turn by Raj Zutshi as local big-shot Shay. Maja Zamojda's colour-drenched cinematography makes the landscape psychedelically beautiful but the plot hangs on a patronising conception of India as a land defined by corruption and cow-worship. Despite a witty script and a strong cast, the film feels like a blast from a less globalised past in its depiction of Abroad as a far-flung elsewhere full of westerners who want to wrestle with their demons and get a suntan while they're at it. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Andy Brunskill Robert Sheehan Craig Tuohy <b>Producer</b> Daniel Emmerson <b>Written by</b> Simon Lewis Dan M. Brown From the novel Go by Simon Lewis <b>Additional Material</b> Charles Henri Belleville Robert Sheehan <b>Director of            Photography</b> Maja Zamojda <b>Editors</b> Immanuel von Bennigsen Ben Hooten Andy Morrison <b>Production            Designer</b> Laura Ellis-Cricks <b>Music</b> Roger Goula <b>Supervising            Sound Editor</b> Vanesa Lorena Tate <b>Costume Designer</b> Rebecca Gore  @Go Film Productions	<b>Ltd./SUMS Film            &amp; Media Ltd</b> <b>Production            Companies</b> Bob & Co presents a SUMS Film & Media, Aimage production <b>Executive            Producers</b> Bob Benton Ahmad Ahmadzadeh Richard Bridges Carolyn Bennett Simon Flamank Karel Van Bellingen  <b>Cast</b> <b>Robert Sheehan</b> Lee <b>Osy Ikhile</b> Sol <b>Sofia Boutella</b> Vix <b>Jasper Pääkkönen</b> Mike <b>Raj Zutshi</b> Shay <b>Adelayo Adedayo</b> Adeze <b>Mansoor</b> <b>Ahmed Khan</b> Red Tooth <b>Sanjay Vichare</b> Stetson	<b>Angel Mani</b> Sarah <b>Bharat Bhatia</b> Naveen <b>Craig Parkinson</b> Marlowe  <b>In Colour and            Black &amp; White</b> [2.35:1]  <b>Distributor</b> SUMS Film & Media
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Goa, present day. Two young drifters, Lee and Sol, lark about on a beautiful beach on Christmas Eve. There is tension between the pair because Lee is always broke, whereas Sol has a stash of money under his mattress in the beach hut they share with Mike, a taciturn soldier-turned-Buddhist who is seeking inner peace through meditation and non-violence. The trio's brittle status quo is shattered by the arrival of Vix, Lee's former lover, who knew him and Sol in London when they were involved with dangerous people smuggler Marlowe. In flashback we learn that, through Lee's impetuosity, they were forced into a violent confrontation with Marlowe, leaving him with severe facial scarring and a grudge.

It transpires that Marlowe has kidnapped Vix's daughter in order to force her to lead him to Lee and Sol in Goa, but when he arrives and tries to kill them, Mike is roused to action and stabs him – though he leaves him alive. With the help of local wheeler-dealer Shay, Lee and Sol finally defeat the London gangster. Lee, Sol, Vix and her daughter look set to make a new life for themselves, but Vix double-crosses the men, steals Sol's money and drives off without them.

## Kalinka

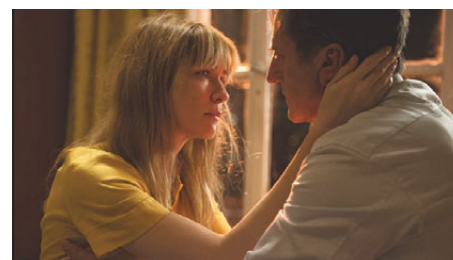
France/Germany/Belgium 2014  
 Director: Vincent Garenq  
 Certificate 15 86m 21s

### Reviewed by Ginette Vincendeau

#### Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

Based on a real case, *Kalinka* follows a father's obsessional 30-year quest for the truth about his adolescent daughter's sudden and unexplained death, moving from Morocco, where the family initially lives, to France and then Germany, where the drama takes place. With this film, his fourth feature, director Vincent Garenq shows clearly, in his attention to detailed evidence and the mechanics of institutions, the influence of his background in television documentary. On the big screen he has continued to delve into French social and criminal cases, as in *The Clearstream Affair* (2014), about the eponymous political scandal, and *Guilty* (2011), the story of a magistrate whose life is ruined by false accusations of sexual abuse (a reference to the notorious Outreau Affair in northern France). Sexual crime and the malfunction of justice are similarly at the heart of *Kalinka*.

Again like the two preceding films, *Kalinka* channels the case through the lengthy ordeal of its central male character. As André Bamberski, the grieving father, Daniel Auteuil delivers the kind of solid and nuanced performance he is much loved for – even if his ageing, chiefly signified by grey stubble, defies plausibility. Bamberski's suspicions about the girl's stepfather, the charismatic but shady Dr Krombach (Sebastian Koch), appear at first to be motivated by sexual jealousy: this is after all the man who 'stole' his wife Dany (Marie-Josée Croze), as she points out. Dany, as well as Bamberski's new girlfriend Cécile (Christelle Cornil), seems initially justified in criticising an obsession that at times verges on paranoia; yet of course in the end he is proved right. Thus, as in the recent *Les Cowboys* (Thomas Bidegain, 2015), or again in *Taken* (Pierre Morel, 2008), a daughter's disappearance triggers a paternal crusade that takes over the father's life and destroys his work, family and relationships, and in the process transforms him into a martyr. Indeed, the religious connotations of the French title, *Au nom de ma fille* ('In the name of my daughter'), are difficult to escape. At the same time, as in the



Marie-Josée Croze, Daniel Auteuil

companion films, male martyrdom strangely marginalises women in situations where one would expect them to be closely involved; rather unbelievably, Dany here appears in turns detached, unconcerned or blind to the facts.

While it draws on documentary, *Kalinka* inevitably, given its topic, also veers towards the crime thriller. But like its hero, the film advances meticulously and rather ploddingly through the procedural aspects of the case – a pace slowed further at times through the necessity of translating material for Bamberski from the German. Some gruesome details relating to the autopsy on the daughter's body are dwelt on (though thankfully left offscreen). Leaving aside a whiff of prurience, the *Kalinka* case, tragic as it is, is fascinating, as are the complications of the legal collaboration, or lack of it, across Europe. Unfortunately the film, while competently made and with good performances, completely lacks tension and thus never quite lives up to its source material. In part the problem is *Kalinka*'s too respectful approach to chronology, with regular mentions of date and place (eight years later... one year later... 1990... 2006...) punctuating the sedate and somewhat literal narration. And in part this is to do with the decision to stay with Bamberski/Auteuil, who as a character (and not just physically) hardly evolves. His last voiceover line, addressed to his daughter – "I conducted this fight for you" – confirms that the film gives us his narrow vision but at the same time reminds the viewer that other stories, of the daughter, the ex-wife or the stepfather, would have been, cinematically at least, as interesting to explore. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Hugo Bergson- Vuillaume Cyril Colbeau-Justin Jean-Baptiste Dupont <b>Screenplay</b> Julien Rappeneau Vincent Garenq Loosely based on the book <i>Pour que            justice se soit rendue</i> by André Bamberski <b>Director of            Photography</b> Renaud Chassaing	<b>Editor</b> Valérie Deseine <b>Art Director</b> François Abellant <b>Original Music</b> Nicolas Errera <b>Sound</b> Jean-Pierre Duret Pascal Villard Marc Doine <b>Costume Designer</b> Marie-Laure Lasson  @LGM Cinéma, Black Mask Productions,	Studiocanal, TF1 Films Production, Arena Multimedia Group <b>Production            Companies</b> LGM Cinéma, Black Mask Productions, Studiocanal present a LGM Cinéma, Black Mask Productions, Studiocanal, TF1 Films Production co-production in co-production with Nexus Factory,	UMedia, Arena Multimedia Group in association with Ufund, Perathon Medien, International Film Partners with the support of La Région Île-de-France, FFF Film Fernseh Fonds Bayern, FFA Filmförderungsanstalt with the participation of Canal+, Ciné+, TF1, D8 A film by Vincent	Garenq <b>Executive Producer</b> David Giordano  <b>Cast</b> <b>Daniel Auteuil</b> André Bamberski <b>Sebastian Koch</b> Dieter Krombach <b>Marie-Josée Croze</b> Dany <b>Christelle Cornil</b> Cécile <b>Serge Feuillard</b>	Gibault, lawyer <b>Christian Kmiotek</b> Robert  <b>Dolby Digital</b> <b>In Colour</b> [2.35:1] <b>Subtitles</b>  <b>Distributor</b> Studiocanal Limited  French theatrical title <b>Au nom de ma fille</b>
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Morocco, France and Germany, 1974 to the present. Businessman André Bamberski and his wife Dany live in Morocco with their young daughter Kalinka and son Pierre. They move to France when André discovers that Dany is having an affair with Dr Krombach, a German acquaintance. The affair continues, however; André and Dany divorce, and Dany joins Krombach in Germany. During one of the children's visits to their mother and stepfather, the adolescent Kalinka dies in mysterious

circumstances. André, unlike Dany, is convinced that Krombach is responsible. He spends the next 30 years unearthing evidence and relentlessly battling the French and German justice systems and friends' and family's opinion. In doing so he alienates his girlfriend Cécile and gives up his job. As new evidence comes to light, Krombach is convicted of the repeated abuse and rape of young women in Germany. Eventually, André is successful in bringing him to trial in France.



## Keeping Up With the Joneses

USA/United Arab Emirates 2016

Director: Greg Mottola

Certificate 12A 105m 10s

### Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

With *Superbad* (2007), director Greg Mottola scored a box-office hit with a fantasy of suburbia's hidden wilderness, seen through the eyes of horny teenage boys and guided by the sympathetic partnership of Seth Rogen and Judd Apatow. Now Mottola returns to the suburbs in action comedy *Keeping Up With the Joneses*, promising to investigate the more adult themes of neighbourly intrusion, jealousy and career dissatisfaction.

Zach Galifianakis and Isla Fisher star as unadventurous couple Jeff and Karen Gaffney, residents of a cul-de-sac both literal and metaphorical. The arrival of impossibly glamorous neighbours Tim and Natalie Jones provides them with a perplexing distraction while their children are at summer camp. Played by *Mad Men*'s Jon Hamm and Gal Gadot, a former soldier and model best known as Wonder Woman in the DC film universe, Tim and Natalie are gorgeous, passionate, well-travelled and worldly – everything the beige Gaffneys are not. They are also, it turns out, government spies, a fact the Gaffneys discover after conducting their own surveillance via social media, curtain-twitching, a discreet home invasion and holding an interrogation of sorts in a diner booth. So the Joneses' abilities to shoot, drive and spy do battle with the Gaffneys' homespun skills of intelligence-gathering (a combination of neighbourly nosiness and patient listening) and multitasking under pressure (arbitrating a dispute between their children in a speeding car, under a hail of gunfire). Jeff's apparently uninteresting job in HR not only proves accidentally pivotal in an international arms deal, but has also provided him with some impressively disarming interpersonal skills.

Galifianakis and Fisher are adept comic actors, but they are undone here by a chain of weak jokes (it is something of a running gag that Jeff cracks terrible one-liners, which are no more hilarious for being intentionally bad) and a gabbling, rushing pace, which nullifies even the touches of



Gun shy: Isla Fisher, Zach Galifianakis

observational humour – as when, while packing for a quick getaway, the couple fret about whether a bikini is essential. Hamm and Gadot, mostly playing it straight, fare a little better once their characters have been introduced, their essential coolness slowing their dialogue down to a point where the gags can occasionally find their target.

As a comedy, *Keeping Up With the Joneses* is hamstrung by clumsiness, but as an action movie it stumbles further: the mysterious 'Mr Scorpion' turns out to be more a Gaffney than a Jones; a deadly snakebite is promptly nixed with an antidote; and an extended cut-price car chase takes place entirely in empty warehouses, driving home the fact that this spy caper is merely a bend in the road for our cul-de-sac couple. Although, inevitably, a coda sets the scene for a second mission implausible, should anyone require a *Keeping up with the Joneses 2*. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Laurie MacDonald  
Walter F. Parkes  
**Written by**  
Michael LeSieur  
**Director of Photography**  
Andrew Dunn  
**Film Editor**  
David Rennie  
**Production Designer**  
Mark Ricker

**Music**  
Jake Monaco  
**Production Sound Mixer**  
Steve C. Aaron  
**Costume Designer**  
Ruth Carter  
**Stunt Co-ordinator**  
Steve Ritz  
**@Twentyth**  
Century Fox Film

Corporation and  
TSG Entertainment  
Finance LLC  
**Production Companies**  
Fox 2000 Pictures  
presents a  
Parkes+MacDonald  
production  
Made in association  
with TSG  
Entertainment

An Imagination  
production  
**Executive Producers**  
Timothy M. Bourne  
Marc Resteghini  
**Cast**  
**Zach Galifianakis**  
Jeff Gaffney  
**Jon Hamm**  
Tim Jones

**Isla Fisher**  
Karen Gaffney  
**Gal Gadot**  
Natalie Jones  
**Matt Walsh**  
Dan Craverston  
**Maribeth Monroe**  
Meg Craverston  
**Patton Oswalt**  
Scorpion  
**Kevin Dunn**  
Carl Pronger

**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
20th Century Fox  
International (UK)

Atlanta, present day. Jeff and Karen Gaffney live in a suburban cul-de-sac. When improbably glamorous new neighbours Tim and Natalie Jones move into the street, their suspicions are aroused. Karen follows Natalie on a shopping trip, while Jeff bumps into Tim and they have lunch together. The Gaffneys discover that Tim has bugged them, so they break into the other couple's house and discover evidence that they are spies, seeking information about MBI, the company Jeff works for. The Gaffneys attend an early-morning meeting with MBI's head of security, but he is killed by a sniper; when the Joneses arrive in a car, the Gaffneys jump in to evade assassins on motorbikes. After a car chase, the Joneses reveal that they are government

spies. When they return to the cul-de-sac, the Joneses' house explodes. The Gaffneys fear that their new friends are dead, but find them in their own basement, holding two more neighbours, Dan and Meg, hostage. Dan has been smuggling microchips from MBI to an international arms dealer, Mr Scorpion. A plan is formed for the Gaffneys to pose as Dan and Meg and deliver the microchips to Mr Scorpion. They meet in a hotel suite, and a shootout ensues when Jeff blows their cover; both couples escape and return to the cul-de-sac. The Joneses leave to continue their undercover life.

The following summer, holidaying in Marrakesh, the Gaffneys bump into Tim and Natalie amid another operation.

## The Last Family

Poland 2016

Director: Jan P. Matuszynski

Certificate 15 122m 21s

### Reviewed by Michael Brooke

A refreshing exception to the rule that Polish films about real people and events tend to be comparatively inaccessible to non-Poles, documentarist Jan P. Matuszynski's feature debut assumes no prior knowledge of the life and work of surrealist painter Zdzislaw Bekinski (1929-2005) and his radio-presenter son Tomasz, or 'Tomek' (1958-99), and swotting up on their lives between two screenings made surprisingly little difference. As the title suggests, it's primarily a dysfunctional family saga, focusing on the often stormy relationship between two intensely creative men with strikingly different personalities – when sharing a Chinese meal, one uses chopsticks, the other a fork.

Zdzislaw, superbly played by Wajda veteran Andrzej Seweryn, is the incarnation of affability, any personal demons firmly restricted to the studio room where he paints bizarre dreamscapes populated by creatures of indeterminate species. Despite growing fame and increasing financial security, his domestic life could hardly be more ordinary, and remains so till the end. Living and working in a cramped high-rise flat with his wife Zofia and their respective mothers (both named Stanislaw), one minute he'll be painting to his beloved classical music, the next he'll be unselfconsciously licking the plate clean after a satisfying meal, or improvising a makeshift lavatory after the plumbing packs up. "You seem so upbeat. I was expecting a gloomy castle," says Piotr Dmochowski, a lawyer who became Zdzislaw's international agent and amanuensis.

Tomek, by contrast, is such a bundle of neuroses that he could single-handedly fuel an entire psychoanalysts' conference. His first suicide attempt comes early on, and his various romantic relationships founder on trivialities – though his fear of flying is retrospectively justified by his plane actually crashing. He describes himself as "an enthusiast", and that's part of his problem: unlike his far more disciplined father (whose MSc in engineering may be significant here), his enthusiasms are wide-ranging and wayward, though he does achieve success as a DJ, radio presenter and film translator. Actor Dawid Ogrodnik's big career breakthrough was as a man with severe cerebral palsy in Maciej Pieprzyc's *Life Feels Good* (2013), where he also bravely refused to pander to audience sympathies.

As so often, it's the women who provide level-headed practical support – at an early stage, Zofia briskly disposes of a spider that to her overly imaginative spouse represents any number of nameless horrors. She can also be relied on to inject withering sarcasm into an



Seweryn, Ogrodnik and Konieczna



## Let's Be Evil

United Kingdom 2015-2016

Director: Martin Owen

Certificate 15 82m 36s

### Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

*Let's Be Evil* may succinctly be described as a *Children of the Damned* knock-off set in a future America gripped by an education crisis, a high-concept, low-budget picture made with the barest of means: some actors of little repute, a few windowless concrete corridors decorated with pretty-coloured lights, and passing-grade homemade computer graphics.

Such poverty of means can be the mother of invention, though it's evident from the movie's first five minutes that the filmmakers can't frame a shot to save their lives, much less spin a silk purse from the proverbial sow's ear. Compositional shortcomings are cheated around thanks to the fact that the rest of the movie is filtered, *Peep Show*-style, through the digital-read-out-augmented POVs of its three central protagonists, Jenny (Elizabeth Morris), Darby (Elliot James Langridge) and Tiggs (Kara Tointon), chaperones hired to look after a group of children being groomed for great futures in a subterranean bunker that serves as a school for the talented and gifted. (The institute, the Posterity Project, is established as being located beneath Los Angeles City Hall, which is a bit like using the Bank of England building for an exterior and counting on no one recognising it.) There is a convoluted reason for this subjective approach that I won't get into, though explaining it does help director and co-screenwriter Martin Owen to pad things out to satisfactory feature length, a task otherwise achieved through generous portions of awkward, chemistry-free badinage between the three leads and a bit of backstory involving the violent death of Jenny's father, an incident that opens the movie and awkwardly interrupts a couple of times afterwards, like a forgotten dinner guest.

What you've got here otherwise is a lot of scrambling around in hallways and air-conditioning vents and desperate attempts to create suspense by dropping the sound of a beating heart on to the soundtrack. The



Bad education: Isabelle Allen

only terrifying thing is the prospect that the filmmakers perhaps believe they have something bigger on their minds than ginning up a handful of jump scares destined to be buried at the bottom of some streaming service's 'Thriller' section. Scenes of the little prodigies intently at work, their fingers a-flutter manipulating data that's visible only to them, suggest a possible intention to parody the coming generation of smartphone-trained super-cyber-kids, but this goes no further than knee-jerk technophobia. As to the use of names with classical and mythological implications – 'Tiggs' is short for Antigone, and the valedictorian of this Posterity Project class is Cassandra – well, your guess is as good as mine; it's the kind of move typical of filmmakers who want to reassure an audience and themselves that they're making something more refined than a hinky genre exercise.

Altogether it's an object lesson in how to create dramatic inertia through perpetual motion, so devoid of points of interest that at one point I found myself scanning the 'hi-tech computer read-out text' on the side of the screen for amusement, and quickly hit on a glaring spelling error: "PLEASE US CAUTION". Make no mistake, the education crisis is real. ☹

### Credits and Synopsis

**Producers**  
Leszek Bodzak  
Aneta Hickinbotham

**Screenplay**

Robert Bolesto

**Director of**

**Photography**

Kacper Fertacz

**Editor**

Przemysław

Chrusciewski

**Production**

**Designer**

Jagna Janicka

**Sound**

Jaroslav Bajdowski

Kacper Habisiak

Marcin Kasinski

**Costume Designer**

Emilia Czarzoryska

©Aurum Film, HBO

Europe, Mazowiecki

Institut Kultury,

Lightcraft, Universal

Music Polska

**Production**

**Companies**

Aurum Film presents

in co-production

with HBO Europe,

Mazowiecki

Institut Kultury,

Lightcraft, Universal

Music Polska

Film co-financed by

the Polski Instytut

Sztuki Filmowej

Production

Aurum Film

Co-producers HBO

Europe, Mazowiecki

Institut Kultury,

Mazowiecki

Fundusz Filmowy,

Lightcraft, Universal

Music Polska

**Executive Producer**

Leszek Bodzak

**Film Extracts**

[audio only]

*The Spy Who*

*Loved Me* (1977)

**Cast**

**Andrzej Seweryn**

Zdzisław Beksiński

**Dawid Ogrodnik**

Tomasz Beksiński

**Aleksandra**

**Konieczna**

Zofia Beksińska

**Andrzej Chyra**

Piotr Dmochowski

**In Colour**

[2.35:1]

**Subtitles**

**Distributor**

New Europe

Film Sales

Polish theatrical title

*Ostatnia rodzina*

**Warsaw, 1977.** Surrealist painter Zdzisław Beksiński and his wife Zofia help their psychologically troubled son Tomek to move into a new flat. The couple live nearby with their respective mothers.

**1979.** Zdzisław and Tomek argue constantly, with Zofia as reluctant mediator. Tomek unsuccessfully attempts suicide.

**1982.** Tomek becomes a regular radio presenter. Lawyer Piotr Dmochowski proposes becoming Zdzisław's international agent. Tomek opposes this, but Zdzisław favours financial security. He buys a camcorder, and starts making home movies.

**1985.** Tomek discusses his sex life with Zofia, specifically his revulsion at intimate contact. Zdzisław's mother becomes bedridden. Tomek attempts suicide again.

**1986.** Tomek screens James Bond films with his own voiceover translation. Dmochowski interviews Zdzisław at length. Zdzisław's mother dies.

**1988.** Tomek survives a plane crash that he superstitiously predicted.

**1992.** Zofia's mother dies. Dmochowski publishes a book of his interviews with Zdzisław, and Zofia is horrified by the level of intimate family detail it contains.

**1997.** During an argument with Tomek, Zdzisław reveals that Zofia is dying, and asks him not to do anything drastic while she is still alive. Zdzisław films her even more obsessively, including immediately after her death.

**1999.** Zdzisław destroys some of his recordings. Tomek records a final pre-millennium radio programme, and kills himself. A family moves into Zdzisław's flat, where they act as his carers. Zdzisław continues to be interviewed by Dmochowski.

**2005.** Zdzisław is stabbed to death by his carer's teenage son.

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**

Jonathan Willis

Martin Owen

Elizabeth Morris

Weena

Wijitkhuanphan

Matt Williams

**Written by**

Martin Owen

**Story**

Martin Owen

Elizabeth Morris

Based on an

original concept by

Jonathan Willis

**Director of**

**Photography**

Chase Bowman

**Edited by**

Daniel Gethic

**Production Designer**

Melissa Spratt

**Music**

Julian Scherle

**Supervising**

**Sound Editor**

James Feltham

**Costume Designer**

Annelise Buesnel

©Let's Be Evil Ltd

**Production**

**Companies**

Posterity Pictures

presents a Martin

Owen film

A Posterity picture

**Executive Producers**

Amandeep Sandhu

John Cruse

David Bostock

Brandon Smith

Alan Thompson

Mike Norris

Chris Furness

Pratima Desai

Mike Harrison

John Harrison

Laura Yeates

Dave Yeates

Vincent Bull

Simon James

Bill Roberts

Jonathan Kendall

Trevor Howard

Michael Holmes

Dave Ellor

Carl Welham

Mark Clenshaw

Martin Barnes

David Ronaldson

Robin Kayser

**Cast**

**Elizabeth Morris**

Jenny

**Elliot James**

**Langridge**

Darby

**Kara Tointon**

Tiggs

**Isabelle Allen**

Cassandra

**Sophie Willis**

young Jenny

**Jules Brown**

Jenny's father

**In Colour**

[2.35:1]

**Distributor**

Vertigo Films

Los Angeles, the near future. A crisis in education grips the US, which lags behind India and China. Jenny is a young woman who as a child witnessed her father's death, and who is now caring for her ailing mother. She is recruited to act as chaperone to a group of high-achieving children who are being groomed for greatness in an underground educational facility. She is grateful for the job, which gives her a chance to pay medical bills. After putting on VR-style glasses that plug her into an advanced communications system and allow her to see in the pitch-dark subterranean facility, Jenny joins co-workers Tiggs and Darby. They are initiated into the facility's routines by Arial, an OS with humanoid characteristics. Their job is to look after the students, who spend their days silently manipulating computer puzzles. Jenny gradually befriends one of the children, Cassandra. While doing her evening rounds, Jenny is plagued by strange incidents, and one night she and Tiggs discover all the children missing from their bunks: a full-scale rebellion is under way. After collecting Cassandra – who seems to be afraid of the other children – the chaperones attempt to make their way out, following Arial's instructions. One by one they are picked off, and finally Jenny discovers that Cassandra has been controlling Arial all along, leading her to her death.



# Life, Animated

USA 2016

Director: Roger Ross Williams

Certificate PG 91m 39s

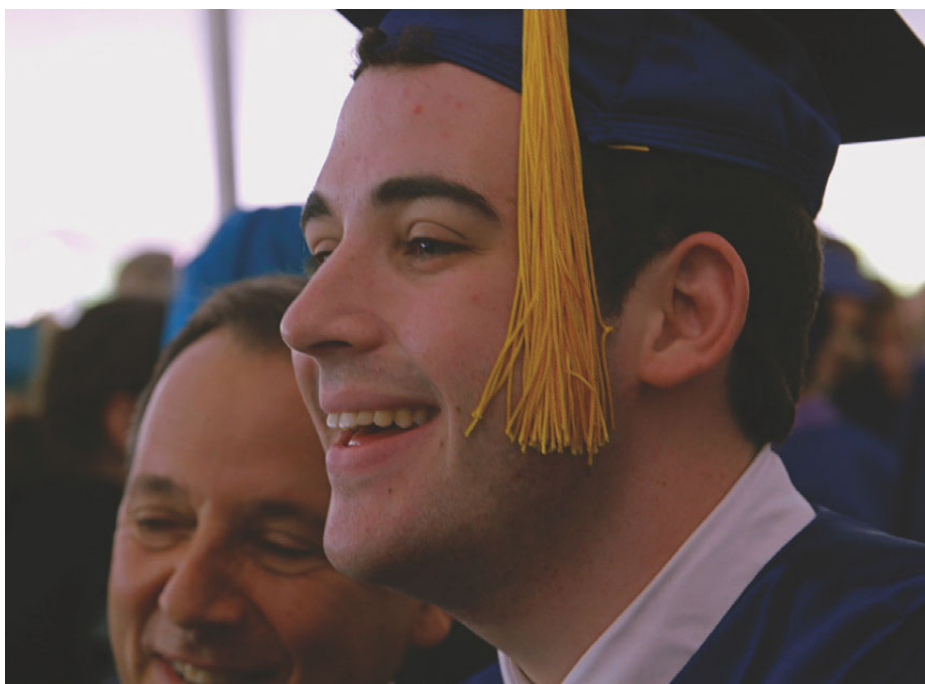
## Reviewed by Hannah McGill

Autism has become a current generation's "defining psychiatric malady", Benjamin Wallace wrote in *New York* magazine in 2014 – a condition not only better understood and more diagnosed than in previous eras, but also applied and misapplied scattergun-fashion as shorthand for certain behaviours and traits, and even claimed as a status symbol by people who wish to be found more pitiable and exotic by others. A psychiatric diagnosis, wrote Wallace, has become "a conceptual gadget for processing the modern world".

Little wonder, then, that it's been boom time of late for stories about the life experiences, coping strategies and achievements of autistic people. For an audience that has grown up lay-diagnosing autistic tendencies here, there and everywhere, these become not just feel-good tales of limitations being overcome, but highly relatable metaphors for the ways in which we all battle such challenges as sensory overstimulation and contradictory emotional signals.

In *Life, Animated*, the strategy in question – 23-year-old Owen Suskind's deployment of Disney films, their dialogue and their characters as a language with which to converse with the world – is a particularly vivid and endearing one, which offers its own engagingly straightforward metaphor for how we use art. But Owen as a sort of embodiment of fandom – a walking object lesson in the consoling and guiding power of art – is only part of the story here. More interesting, perhaps, is Roger Ross Williams's sensitive treatment of the family around Owen: articulate, loving high-achievers all, whose grief for the person they expected Owen to be gives way to a fierce determination to do right by the person that he is, and whose initial "rescue mission to get inside this prison of autism and pull him out" – as father Ron Suskind describes it – is adjusted along the way.

And that way is by no means easy. If Owen's special means of communication helps to deliver him from loneliness by giving him a blueprint for social interaction and a subject for conversation, it's not a solution to the challenges with which everyday life will continue to present him. Hollywood might have provided him with a lingua franca with the neuro-typical, but there's no suggestion of a Hollywood-style "cure". It's slightly odd, in fact, that since its prizewinning Sundance premiere this film has been so widely characterised as sunny and feelgood, because Owen's trajectory is by no means one of uninterrupted progress – and his Disneyfied worldview is shown to have considerable limitations in terms of the tools it provides him with. Owen, his parents explain, responds to the "exaggerated expressions and emotions" of Disney characters, which are easier for him to read than subtler everyday cues. We duly see him live out his emotional life in vivid extremes: his romance with girlfriend Emily is all hearts, flowers and baby voices, until she breaks up with him, eliciting apocalyptic despair: "Why is life so full of unfair pain and tragedy? Why did this have to happen and make my life sad for ever...?" Of being bullied, Owen says, "At that point I fell into darkness and walked the halls of fear."



A whole new world: Owen Suskind

But as Owen's therapist says, "The real world is not a Disney script." Owen's primary-coloured melodrama is cute on screen, but it won't necessarily help in achieving the independence and autonomy that his family craves for him. The film plays both sides somewhat, allowing such doubts to surface while still resorting to stirring Disney clips of loveable characters overcoming adversity with guts and faith to illustrate Owen's quest through life. This slight doublethink arguably tells us something about documentary culture, and the pressure experienced by filmmakers to force real stories into conventional narrative trajectories: filmmakers and audiences alike are prone, like Owen, to applying unrealistic expectations to life in terms of narrative coherence, just deserts and triumph over adversity. This does mean that some

details which might have deepened the story have been backgrounded in favour of animation sequences – both Disney clips, and new work by French company Mac Guff – that emphasise the storybook elements of the narrative. Ideas around how Owen operates in the world and what we might be able to learn from it remain underdeveloped; although he attends and speaks at a conference in France concerned with looking at how autistic people's obsessions help them to cope with life, we see little of what is discussed there. Finally, amid the lionisation of Disney-as-saviour and the mild doubts presented over its drawbacks as a guide to life, something else stands out. We're never told how Owen responds to films, animated or otherwise, that are made beyond his favourite studio (which licensed the clips, but had no editorial input into the film). 

## Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Roger Ross Williams  
Julie Goldman  
**Inspired by**  
the book by Ron  
Suskind *Life  
Animated: A Story  
of Sidekicks, Heroes,  
and Autism*  
**Cinematography**

Tom Bergmann  
**Edited by**  
David Teague  
**Original Music**  
Dylan Stark  
T. Griffin  
**Sound Recordist**  
John Osborne  
**Original Animation**  
Mac Guff

©Life Animated  
Documentary  
Productions LLC  
**Production  
Companies**  
A&E Indiefilms  
presents a Motto  
Pictures production  
A film by Roger  
Ross Williams

**Executive Producers**  
Molly Thompson  
Robert DeBitetto  
Robert Sharenow  
Ron Suskind  
**Film Extracts**  
*Fantasia* (1940)  
*Peter Pan* (1953)  
*The Little Mermaid*  
(1989)

*The Lion King* (1994)  
*Aladdin* (1992)  
*The Hunchback of  
Notre Dame* (1996)  
*Bambi* (1942)  
*Hercules* (1997)  
*Beauty and the  
Beast* (1991)  
*The Jungle  
Book* (1967)

**In Colour**  
[1.78:1]

**Distributor**  
Dogwoof

A documentary with animated sequences. As American 23-year-old Owen Suskind prepare to graduate from his special school and move into his own apartment, his parents Ron and Cornelia Suskind relate how the autism diagnosed in him at the age of three has affected all their lives. Owen's physical coordination deteriorated and his speech and language comprehension appeared to cease. One enduring source of pleasure, however, was Disney movies; his family eventually determined that the young Owen was not only absorbing but memorising the films' dialogue. Disney narratives and characters became a means for them to communicate with Owen, and for him to process feelings and

experiences, such as the trauma of being rejected by one school and bullied at another. Owen's affinity with Disney endures into his adulthood. By the time of his graduation, he has found solace in drawing and writing his own stories and setting up a Disney Club at school. He also has a girlfriend, Emily. Owen's parents help him move into an assisted-living community; Emily has the apartment upstairs. Things go well until Emily breaks up with him. Owen is devastated, but pulls himself back together with his family's help. He travels to France to address a conference about autism, gets a job at a cinema, and texts Emily to express the hope that they can remain friends.

## Mum's List

United Kingdom 2016  
Director: Niall Johnson  
Certificate 12A 101m 25s

### Reviewed by Kate Stables

Moving but maladroit, this adaptation of St John 'Singe' Greene's popular memoir about his late wife Kate's battle with cancer has a distinctly TV-movie feel. Like those other recent British true-life dramas about people facing extraordinarily tragic illnesses, *Starfish* (2016) and BBC TV's *The C-Word* (2015), it's a celebration of loyalty and fortitude. But the film's insistence on heavily underlining Kate and Singe's mutual devotion, means that their characters are painted in broad, sentimental strokes, from their teen romance onwards. Combined with dialogue that strains for a plethora of meaningful moments, it often creates a mawkish mood. The film's odd moments of understated frailty are, perversely, much more piercing.

Writer-director Niall Johnson opts for a naturalistic televisual style, though a direct-to-camera address by Kate ticking off life's pleasures sits slightly oddly with this. He keeps the scale small, corralling the story and gradually contracting its sphere to show the family's efforts to catch everyday joys as they fly. A strong sense of place (Clevedon's Victorian pier and beaches play a large part) and an unabashed appreciation of Kate's whimsical habits mean that the film never feels generic. However, the three-layered story structure intercutting the Greenes' idyllic teen courtship with Kate's decline, and with Singe's dazed life without her, feels a little clumsy.

Emilia Fox underplays effectively as the optimistic Kate. But Rafe Spall's blokey Singe, blindsided but game for the challenges of his new life, is the film's standout player. His bewildered monologue about what his infant son's earlier gruelling cancer treatment taught him about life's unfairness gives a glimpse of what the film could have been. 📺

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Nick Hamson	Rebecca Duncan Victoria Russell	Rachel <b>Richard Cordery</b> Bob <b>Susan Jameson</b>
<b>Written for the Screen by</b> Niall Johnson	@Acres & Acres Ltd	Christine <b>Bobby Lockwood</b>
<b>Based on the book by</b> St John Greene with Rachel Murphy	<b>Production Companies</b> Studio Soho	Matt <b>Ross McCormack</b>
<b>Director of Photography</b> Eben Bolter	presents a Nick Hamson production A Niall Johnson film	teenage Singe <b>William Stagg</b>
<b>Film Edited by</b> Robin Sales	<b>Executive Producers</b> Gareth Jones	Reef Greene <b>Matthew Stagg</b>
<b>Production Design by</b> Kiera Tudway	Chris Wood	Finn Greene <b>Sophie Simnett</b>
<b>Original Music Composed by</b> Amelia Warner	Sarah Weatherstone Niall Johnson	teenage Kate <b>Ciara Charteris</b> Olivia
<b>Production Sound Mixer</b> David Bekkevold	<b>Cast</b> <b>Rafe Spall</b> Singe Greene	<b>In Colour</b> <b>[2.35:1]</b>
<b>Costumes Designed by</b>	<b>Emilia Fox</b> Kate Greene	<b>Distributor</b> Munro Film Services
	<b>Elaine Cassidy</b>	

Somerset, 2010. Bereaved father Singe adapts to life with two small sons after his wife Kate's death from breast cancer. Flashbacks to Singe and Kate's teenage romance are interwoven with Kate's battle with cancer, which was diagnosed after their eldest son had beaten a rare form of the disease. After surgery and chemotherapy, Kate goes into remission, but is then diagnosed with terminal lung cancer. She compiles a list of goals, instructions and her own memories for her family's life without her. Singe carries out her wishes over the first year after her death, and finds himself ready to date again.

## The Music of Strangers Yo Yo Ma and the Silk Road Ensemble

USA 2015, Director: Morgan Neville, Certificate 12A 95m 20s

### Reviewed by Hannah McGill

There's a bitter tang to watching this film – about the potential of travel, cultural cross-pollination and artistic enlightenment to heal divisions and create connections – in the wake of a US election result that may be read as having struck a decisive blow against such airy liberal fancies. Morgan Neville's portrait of the international musical supergroup founded by cellist Yo-Yo Ma doesn't wholly duck the charge of cosy elitism – “Can a piece of music stop a bullet? Can it feed someone who's hungry?” demands Syrian clarinetist Kinan Azmeh, as his country is pummelled by war – but for the most part the idea that virtuosos of various classical and traditional instruments getting together and playing music will make the world a better place is taken as read.

The resulting film is glossy and efficient, but feels somewhat thinly spread. It darts between the musicians' personal stories and sequences of them playing together, without closely analysing what it is that Ma is after or whether he's achieving it. The intention, Ma himself says, is “making sure that culture matters”; what he wants, according to American contributor Mike Block, is to “change the world”. But what these slogans amount to is not much interrogated, and they lend the film the calculated vague positivity of a high-end advertising campaign. A restless camera, meanwhile, adds to the sense of something that's whirling by us rather than letting us sit with it.

The film's most exciting and affecting parts by far come in the portraits of the musicians themselves: the irrepressibly charismatic Cristina Pato, star of the Galician bagpipe and injector of much boisterous sexiness into what might otherwise be a slightly bloodless bunch of performers; sad-eyed Kayhan Kalhor, an Iranian player of the kamancheh (a bowed string instrument), and survivor of unimaginable personal losses, who continues to be censored and spied on by his own government; and pipa player Wu Man, who introduces her traditional lute-like instrument (or an electric version, at any rate) to a bit of Black Sabbath. Ma himself emerges as genial



Ensemble work: Yo-Yo Ma

but enigmatic, seemingly driven to try new things by the sheer boredom of being unbelievably accomplished, successful and celebrated – “How do you keep your interest up?” asks his friend John Williams – but still somewhat impenetrable in his smooth good cheer. When he says, “I knew whatever we did there would be naysayers on all sides,” one rather hopes to hear a little more about the choppy aspects of the project. But the film quickly spins us back to its happy place of celebrating global creative communication and the fortitude of the human spirit. It's largely left up to the viewer to draw out the film's more challenging nuances, such as how necessary it is and whose responsibility to prop up artforms that lack obvious contemporary currency; what ‘cultural identity’ really means; and whether art can truly claim the power to affect social structures or promote moral messages, or is better simply construed as a source of solace. 📺

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Caitrin Rogers	<b>Production Sound</b> Dennis Hamlin Dimitri Tisseyre	The Orchard presents in association with Participant Media, The Silk Road Project, HBO Documentary Films with support from National Endowment for the Humanities, Pershing Square Foundation, JustFilms/Ford Foundation	Jeff Skoll Diane Weyermann Laura Freid Julie Goldman William Ackman Hyun-Sang Cho Nancy Stephens Rick Rosenthal	Sheila Nevins
<b>Director of Photography</b> Graham Willoughby	@Silk Road Project Inc.	A Tremelo production A Morgan Neville film		<b>In Colour</b> [1.85:1]
<b>Edited by</b> Jason Zeldes Helen Kearns	<b>Production Companies</b>	<b>Executive Producers</b>		<b>Distributor</b> The Orchard

A documentary about the Silk Road Ensemble, an international music collective created by cellist Yo-Yo Ma.

In 1998, inspired by the quest of his early mentor Leonard Bernstein to establish a cross-cultural language through music, Ma begins to bring musicians together from numerous territories. The resulting ensemble combines classical and folk traditions, using the standard instruments of the western orchestra and a variety of indigenous instruments.

The film visits Ma's early life as a cello prodigy (at the age of seven he played for President John F. Kennedy), before examining the life stories of some of the Silk Road Ensemble players. Chinese pipa virtuoso Wu Man explains that encouraging her musicianship was her parents' response to the privations of the

Cultural Revolution. Clarinetist Kinan Azmeh speaks of his ambivalence about the effectiveness of art in the face of the ongoing bloodshed in his native Syria. Iranian kamancheh player Kayhan Kalhor discusses his problems with government surveillance and suppression. Cristina Pato brings her exuberant style of Galician bagpipe-playing to the group.

As the ensemble establishes itself, it faces criticism for diluting musical traditions, but Ma and the other members continue expanding its work and their own projects: Wu Man brings traditional Chinese musicians to the US; Pato sets up her own Galician culture festival; and Azmeh teaches Syrian children in refugee camps. Kalhor, after his first concert in Iran is cancelled for 'security reasons', resolves not to play there until the political climate alters.



## Operation Chromite

South Korea 2015  
Director: John H. Lee  
Certificate 15 110m 46s

### Reviewed by Jasper Sharp

Following his local hit *71: Into the Fire* (2010), John H. Lee's latest attempt at pushing the Korean War back into contemporary consciousness has already been a huge success on its own terms, becoming one of South Korea's biggest homegrown hits of 2016. One can see the appeal for audiences who, generations removed from the 'forgotten war', are still living with the consequences on their side of the 38th parallel. The true-life operation inspiring the narrative – in 1950, an eight-man resistance unit crosses enemy lines into communist-occupied Incheon to prepare the ground for the decisive amphibious invasion that led to Kim Il-sung's forces being driven back north – provides ripe fodder for a modern mythological makeover.

Yet viewers not familiar with South Korea's current crop of screen talent may find this action-packed tale of derring-do, in the vein of *The Guns of Navarone* (1961) and *The Dirty Dozen* (1967), a bewildering experience. This is less to do with any narrative complexity than with the stylistically overwrought manner in which the story is presented and a breakneck pace that leaves the ensemble cast desperately underwritten – especially the young nurse played by Jin Se-yeon, whose ideological conversion to the resistance is so perfunctory one wonders why the character was included at all.

Lee Bum-soo provides some of the more memorable moments as Colonel Lim, head of the North Korean command in Incheon, casually puffing on a cigarette while spouting Marxist rhetoric and authorising the execution of all and sundry with the ruthless insouciance of a Bond villain. The performance is, nonetheless, emblematic of Lee's unsophisticated approach to cutting through the fog of war via the second-hand tropes of 21st-century action movies: the hyperrealistic 45-degree shutter effect that has become de rigueur since *Saving Private Ryan* (1998); emotive orchestral swells beneath the sound of muffled gunfire to signal the more poignant



Southern discomfort: Lee Bum-soo, Lee Jung-jae

moments; videogame-inspired first-person shootouts with computer-generated flashes of fire, smoke and blood squibs; and agitated camerawork that is never allowed to linger long enough to register any genuine feelings of pain, death or fear, nor any sense of a conflict stretching beyond the immediate action on screen.

Liam Neeson's one-dimensional portrayal of MacArthur draws most attention to the overall air of crudeness. His scenes, as he pokes around at military maps in the UN command HQ in Tokyo between long lugs on his trademark corn-cob pipe, seem curiously detached from the main drama, as the undercover unit goes about its business of retrieving the charts that reveal the positions of underwater mines choking up Incheon's harbour. Lim's comment to Kim Il-sung that MacArthur sees the Battle of Incheon as his personal Normandy is later reiterated in his own second-in-command Hoyt Vandenberg's accusations of blind careerism, but the film's near-deification of this complex, controversial figure, though humanised through his fictitious personal relationship with the undercover unit's leader Captain Jang Hak-soo, suggests a triumphant full-stop to a crucial Cold War episode that in reality has never been cleanly resolved. Ⓢ

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Chung Tae-won  
**Producer**  
Yang Chang-hoon  
**Screenplay**  
Lee Man-hee  
John H. Lee  
**Original Screenplay**  
Chung Tae-won  
**Adaptation**  
Kim Jae-hwan  
Chung Tae-won  
**Director of Photography**  
Park Jang-hyuck  
**Editor**  
Steve M. Choe  
Kim Woo-hyun  
**Production Designer**  
Choi Ki-ho  
**Music**  
Lee Dong-june  
**Sound Recording**  
Park Jong-kun  
**Costume Designer**  
Oh Sang-jin

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Entertainment  
**Production Companies**  
Industrial Bank of

Korea, Celltrion Inc.  
and CJ Entertainment  
present  
in association with  
Korean Broadcasting  
System, KBS  
Media, Ltd., Union  
Investment Partners,  
IBK-Daesung  
Contents Small  
Giant Fund, Daesung  
Win-Win Fund,  
TIMEWISEINVEST-  
MENT, Korea  
Investment  
Partners Co., Ltd.,  
IBK Securities  
Crowd Funding  
a Taewon  
Entertainment  
production

**Cast**  
**Lee Jung-jae**  
Captain Jang Hak-soo  
**Lee Bum-soo**  
Commander  
Lim Gye-jin  
**Jin Se-yeon**  
Han Chae-seon  
**Liam Neeson**

General Douglas  
MacArthur  
**Hoyt Vandenberg**  
Ryu Jang-choon  
**Kim Byung-ok**  
Choi Seok-joong

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]  
**Part-subtitled**

**Distributor**  
Signature  
Entertainment

Korean theatrical title  
**Incheon Sangryuk**  
Jakjeon

Korea, 1950. War breaks out, and the south rapidly falls to Soviet-backed North Korean troops led by Kim Il-sung. Operating from Tokyo, General Douglas MacArthur of the UN Command orders a covert operation to gather intelligence for a risky amphibious invasion of the port of Incheon. A South Korean special forces unit comprised of members of the KLO resistance group is led by Captain Jang Hak-soo. Posing as a military inspector, Jang infiltrates the North Korean base in Incheon, but immediately falls under suspicion from its commander, Colonel Lim Gye-jin. The team raid the centre to recover charts revealing the position of mines in Incheon harbour, but are interrupted by Lim's second-in-command, Ryu Jang-choon. Jang's identity is revealed. The resulting shootout leaves Ryu hospitalised and the charts destroyed, as Jang escapes with his surviving team members. Han Chae-seon, a nurse working at the communist base, joins the underground resistance after her uncle Choi Seok-joong is executed by Lim for sheltering them. With Han's help, Jang and his team kidnap Ryu from the hospital to gain the crucial information about the mine positions. They then illuminate the lighthouse on the island of Palmido to signal to the UN invasion forces. Jang subsequently kills Lim on the battlefield but is himself fatally wounded. UN forces recapture Seoul.

## Panic

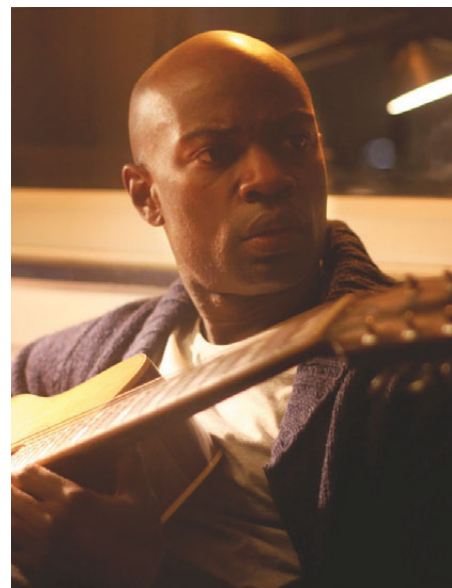
United Kingdom 2014  
Director: Sean Spencer

### Reviewed by Hannah McGill

The fantasy of testing and affirming one's manhood and virtue by stepping in to save a damsel in distress is exposed as just that – a fantasy – in this sombre, *noir*-inflected debut feature from Sean Spencer. Indeed, so lonely a soul is protagonist Deeley (David Gyasi) and so solitary the quest he undertakes that it's tempting to interpret the film's whole narrative as a flight of the imagination: a paranoid extrapolation, perhaps, of the worst that could befall Deeley should he yield to the temptation of sourcing a sexual encounter online. Yet the film's acknowledgement of a shadow society of undocumented people in endless hock to their traffickers anchors it in a grimly believable external reality.

Online sources of intimacy suit Deeley because the trauma of a recent beating has left him agoraphobic. This fight occurred, we learn, when Deeley stepped in to protect a woman from sexual harassment; the film sees him once again disregard his own safety to intervene between a vulnerable woman and violent men. Admirable impulse, or self-serving and deluded attempt to play the hero? The film reserves judgement on this, just as it resists many simplistic explanations and emotional directives. It chooses to explore instead the drift away from reality that has engendered in Deeley such a mix of hyper-caution and recklessness; the sexual dysfunction that makes it easier for him to regard a woman as a cause than as an equal or a partner; and the overarching moral complexity that dooms his quest to do some simple, conscience-clearing good by saving a woman named Kem from sexual enslavement.

That Deeley is a black man is not played up in the film's narrative, but it does complicate its racial politics for the viewer – by placing another person of colour rather than a white 'saviour' in the position of helping an Asian woman amid Asian exploiters, but also by subverting expectations of a black male protagonist. Deeley is gentle, introverted, an intellectual and a music nerd. Sexually, he is compromised and fearful.



Protector: David Gyasi

## The Pass

United Kingdom 2015  
Director: Ben A. Williams  
Certificate 15 86m 54s

He gravitates towards physical violence, but repeatedly comes off worst in his fights. The idea of superior physical strength and potency as a factor in the social identity of the black male – at once a threat to and a compensation for white dominance – excludes an individual like Deeley: fitting neither the profile of the swaggering urban gangster nor the sensitive, cerebral hipster, he has chosen to withdraw.

The woman who offers Deeley a route back to a connected life, meanwhile, also confounds stereotype. Though the position in the narrative occupied by Amy (Pippa Nixon) suggests, in terms of genre convention, the imperilled 'tart with a heart' or the double-dealing femme fatale, she turns out to be autonomous, confident, in control of her own sexuality and morality – and finally more of a saviour to Deeley than he is able to be to Kem. Whether Deeley is truly saved, however, or has simply transferred his obsession from one object to another, is a question that this elegantly understated film leaves its audience to ponder. **B**

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Joe Wihl Oliver Gray	White Night Films presents	Han <b>Suni La</b> Mai
<b>Written by</b> Sean Spencer	<b>Cast</b> <b>David Gyasi</b> Andrew Deeley	<b>Rebecca Yeo</b> Ru
<b>Director of</b> <b>Photography</b> Carl Burke	<b>Pippa Nixon</b> Amy	<b>Valene Kane</b> Kristen
<b>Editor</b> Kate Coggins	<b>Jason Wong</b> Dao	<b>In Colour</b> [2.35:1]
<b>Production</b> <b>Designer</b> Luke Hull	<b>Yennis Cheung</b> Kem	<b>Distributor</b> Trinity Film
<b>Composer</b> Christopher Nicholas Bangs	<b>Chi Chan</b> Zhang	
<b>Sound Designer</b> Jay Price	<b>Cristian Solimeno</b> Pete	
<b>Costume Designer</b> Yann Seabra	<b>Orion Lee</b> Yi	
	<b>Vera Chok</b> Ling	
	<b>Brett Allen</b> Alan	
	<b>Chike Chan</b>	
<b>©Panic Movie Ltd</b> <b>Production</b> <b>Company</b>		

London, the present. Isolated by post-traumatic agoraphobia, Deeley is connected to the outside world only by his work as a music journalist and his habit of peering through binoculars at a young East Asian woman in a nearby flat. Online, Deeley arranges a meeting with a stranger calling herself Michelle; she comes over and they have sex. Afterwards, looking through the binoculars, Michelle sees the young woman being beaten. Michelle leaves abruptly, refusing to talk to the police; Deeley calls them, but hangs up. With difficulty, he manages to leave his house and force his way into the woman's flat. It is empty and in disarray. He finds mail addressed to various Chinese names, and the belongings of a Kem Tragh. Further investigation leads him to an underworld of immigrants working to pay off debts to brutal gangsters. He learns that Kem has fled a Manchester gang to whom she owes money. Initially Deeley clashes with the London gang, but its leader then helps him because of rivalry with his Manchester counterpart. Deeley tracks down Michelle, whose real name is Amy; having initially refused to become involved, she joins him and identifies the man who beat Kem. Deeley follows the man, attacks him, and finds in his car leaflets from a sex club advertising Asian girls. He and Amy go to the club. Deeley finds Kem, but the club's owner intervenes and beats Deeley up. Kem flees. Amy, armed with a shard of glass, saves Deeley, and they return to his flat together.



The path not taken: Russell Tovey, Arinze Kene

### Reviewed by Anton Bitel

In the ninth book of Homer's *Iliad*, the great Greek hero Achilles – homosexual in some versions of the myth, but not in Homer's – reveals that he has been given a choice between two destinies: a short life with everlasting glory, or a long life of anonymity. In *The Pass*, Jason (Russell Tovey) faces a version of this dilemma, updated to a modern age where footballers are the new heroes – and where his fame will be won and his name made in return not so much for a short life as for an empty one.

The film's title alludes to an event that never

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Duncan Kenworthy	©Toledo Productions Limited	Ade <b>Lisa McGrillis</b> Lyndsey
<b>Written by</b> John Donnelly	<b>Production</b> <b>Companies</b> Toledo Productions	<b>Nico Mirallegro</b> Harry
<b>Director of</b> <b>Photography</b> Chris O'Driscoll	presents a Duncan Kenworthy production	<b>Rory Saper</b> bellboy
<b>Editors</b> Masahiro Hirakubo Justine Wright	A Ben A. Williams film	<b>In Colour</b> [1.85:1]
<b>Production</b> <b>Designer</b> Peter Francis	<b>Executive Producer</b> Charles Moore	<b>Distributor</b> Lionsgate UK
<b>Sound Design</b> Glenn Freemantle	<b>Cast</b> <b>Russell Tovey</b> Jason	
<b>Costume Designer</b> Holly Smart	<b>Arinze Kene</b>	

Bucharest, 2006. On the night before their first competitive game, 17-year-old footballers Jason and Ade drink, engage in innuendo-laced banter and homosocial horseplay while parading around their hotel room in their underwear. As they wrestle, Jason notices that Ade has an erection. Jason embraces Ade, then kisses him passionately.

London, 2011. Now a successful football star and married with children, Jason brings pole dancer Lyndsey back to his hotel room. Lyndsey is surprised to learn that Jason already knows she is planning to make a secret video recording of their sexual encounter. Jason reveals that the video is a decoy for the media, to prevent stories of his homosexual affairs getting out. Both agree to play their part for the camera.

Manchester, 2016. Pill-popping Jason has left his family and moved alone into a hotel. He has a knee injury. He invites Ade, now openly gay and working as a plumber, ostensibly for a quote on a plumbing job. They discuss how Jason failed to pass the ball to Ade ten years earlier, ending Ade's footballing hopes. After bellhop Harry briefly joins the party and is humiliated, Jason's sense of superiority crumbles as he realises that Ade has moved on while he cannot.

takes place, on screen or off. Jason and Ade (Arinze Kene) have been at a football academy since they were seven or eight years old. But when, as young adults, they finally play their first competition game (in Bucharest), Jason chooses to go for a goal himself instead of passing the ball to Ade, and so secures his destiny as a professional footballer and celebrity, even as Ade, in fact the better player, is passed over for a place on the team and eventually settles down to life as a plumber. Adapted by John Donnelly from his own 2014 play (with several cast members from the original Royal Court Theatre production reprising their roles), *The Pass* is a three-act drama, set over ten years (like the Trojan War) of Jason's rise and parallel fall, and confined entirely to the hotel rooms where he hides out along the way.

Accordingly, although Jason's public persona and footballing prowess are certainly talked about, they are never actually shown, while his private life and sexual identity come to the fore. If the (non-) pass of the title that propelled Jason to stardom remains hidden from the viewer, a different 'seminal' event from his life, unfolding the night before his first big game, is portrayed (eventually) in full, when Jason and Ade's clowning about in their underwear and exchanging innuendo-tinged 'banter' leads to Jason making a pass of a rather different kind – and then spending the next decade struggling to cover up who he really is and to 'pass' as heterosexual (via an unhappy marriage and a fabricated sex tape with Lisa McGrillis's pole dancer Lyndsey), even as Ade enjoys the life – quieter but less closeted – that he might have had.

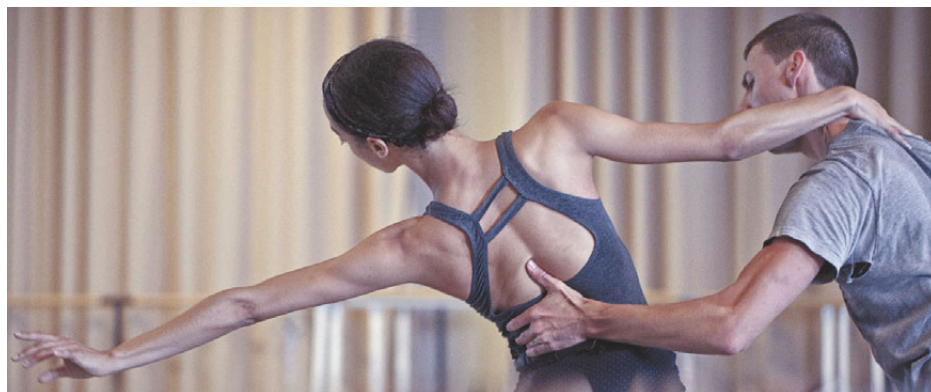
"You got a story you want to keep out of the papers, then you've got to find another story," Jason tells Ade, explaining how a married teammate gets away with his serial adultery. Jason's great tragedy is that, in his thirst for fame and success, he almost believes the legend – and the lie – that he has been living. His eventual downfall, like that of Achilles, is a leg injury – but even if Jason survives this, he has already been dead for years, and faces a future of self-betrayal and desperate loneliness. For in denying Ade that pass, Jason was also denying himself. Intimate to the point of claustrophobia but also tense and tender, director Ben A. Williams's feature debut captures a life of own goals, lived behind closed curtains. **B**



## Reset

France 2015

Directors: Thierry Demaizière, Alban Teurlai



Grace anatomy: Benjamin Millepied

### Reviewed by Ginette Vincendeau

There are at least two reasons to see this documentary about the choreographer Benjamin Millepied's work at the Paris Opera Garnier, where he was appointed director of dance in October 2014. One is the attempt at capturing the creative process involved in producing a new ballet, together with the splendid spectacle of the dancers and the dance itself. Another is Millepied's aura of celebrity beyond the world of ballet, acquired through his collaboration as choreographer and actor on *Black Swan* (2010) and his subsequent marriage to the film's star Natalie Portman – a celebrity enhanced by the fracas caused by his premature resignation from the Opera in early 2016, only a few months after the ballet *Clear, Light, Bright, Forward*, the subject of this documentary, was completed and performed.

Although it was made before Millepied left the Opera Garnier, *Reset* acts as a kind of justification

for his decision. In charting the mounting of the star choreographer's first ballet at the Opera, directors Thierry Demaizière and Alban Teurlai (who also made an as yet unreleased film about the Italian porn star Rocco Siffredi) adopt a classic timeline – the countdown of 39 working days to the premiere – and an equally classic vision of the creative artist ("Classical ballet means exploring one's emotions through dance... like making love"), seen battling against rigid bureaucracy and practical problems that include making an unusually long bench, inconvenient holiday breaks and staff strikes.

Born, raised and partly educated in France, Millepied worked for many years in the US, where he rose to the rank of principal dancer at the New York City Ballet. The film unambiguously presents him as a breath of fresh air and a figure of modernity running up against the Parisian institution's stuffy rules and antiquated attitudes. His democratic rapport with the performers contrasts with his account of the punitive methods in vogue at the Opera, which he claims is traditionally obsessed with testing and classifying dancers. Millepied's decision to cast 16 young members of the corps de ballet at the expense of established *étoiles* (stars), his featuring of two mixed-race dancers contra the tacit 'white rule' and his concern for the dancers' physical wellbeing are all presented as revolutionary and deserving of the French title of the film, *La Relève* ('Renewal').

If there are counterinterviews to this heroic presentation of the iconoclastic (and very good-looking) choreographer, as there certainly were in the French media at the time of his resignation, we do not hear them in the film. As a result, while Millepied emerges as a sympathetic and unpretentious figure, as well as a talented artist, the film does not completely avoid the charge of hagiography. For viewers not totally au fait with the world of ballet, the almost two-hour running time may seem long and the countdown repetitive ('Day -39', 'Day -38', etc), and there is at times a little too much slow motion. But beyond these quibbles and the pros and cons of Millepied's tenure, we are left with some glorious images of beautiful bodies pushing themselves to the limits with total grace. As in a backstage musical, all the fragmented rehearsals, occasional mishaps and frustrations coalesce at the end into the uplifting spectacle of a ballet in which dance, music and lighting fuse harmoniously on stage. **9**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Producer**  
Stéphanie Schorter  
**Cinematography**  
Alban Teurlai  
**Editing**  
Alice Moine  
Alban Teurlai  
**Original Music**  
Pierre Aviat  
**Sound**  
Emmanuel Guionet  
Bertrand Pujol  
Nicolas Bourdon

©Falabracks, Opéra national de Paris

**Production Companies**  
A Falabracks and Opéra national de Paris co-production  
With the participation of Canal+, Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée, Procipec - Société des producteurs and Angoa  
A Thierry Demaizière and Alban Teurlai film

**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]  
**Subtitles**  
  
**Distributor**  
Studiocanal Limited

French theatrical title  
**Relève: Histoire d'une création**

A documentary about choreographer Benjamin Millepied's work with the Paris Opera Garnier. Starting in September 2015 with a gala opening attended by VIPs including President François Hollande, the film goes back in time to retrace the preparations for Millepied's new ballet. We see Millepied, newly appointed director of dance, selecting dancers and conducting rehearsals, and witness the various stages of the project – including the evolving choreography of the ballet in consultation with the young dancers, the design of costumes and Millepied's collaboration with composer Nico Muhly and the conductor. Millepied's modern management style clashes with the Opera's hierarchy. However, despite problems created by the summer holiday break and strikes among Opera personnel, the ballet, titled *Clear, Light, Bright, Forward*, is completed on time, and to great critical acclaim. End credits inform us that Millepied subsequently left the Opera.

## Snowden

USA/Germany/France 2016

Director: Oliver Stone

See Industry,  
page 12

### Reviewed by Philip Kemp

In its overall trajectory, *Snowden* follows the pattern of one of Oliver Stone's most powerful films, *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989). There, Tom Cruise's Ron Kovic goes to Vietnam as an ultra-patriotic soldier, eager to kill commies in the name of the American Way of Life. Seriously wounded and confined to a wheelchair, he morphs into a passionate activist in the anti-war movement. Likewise, Edward Snowden (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) starts out as a Bush-supporting patriot from a military family, an Ayn Rand fan who, first in the US Army Reserve and then as a computer programmer for the CIA, wants "to help my country make a difference in the world". He ends up probably the most famous and thoroughgoing whistleblower in American history, having exposed to the world the full extent of the US government's undercover surveillance of its own citizens and just about everybody else.

The chief difference between the two films is one of tone. *Born* is angry, urgent and vital in its denunciation of the hypocrisy and callousness of official policy. *Snowden* is steady, sober and frankly a little dull; its 138 minutes trudge by at a stolid pace. To some degree this is apt, the film taking its cue from its protagonist: in interviews Snowden invariably comes across as calm and rational. There's no doubting the deep-held sincerity that led him to throw away a flourishing career and wind up an exile from his own country, which now wants to jail him for treason – but he's not going to start shouting about it.

Gordon-Levitt plays the whistleblower accordingly, giving a thoughtful, empathetic performance that remains faithful not only to Snowden's tone of voice but also to his gestures and stance. In the film's final shots, where a smooth camera track allows Snowden himself to substitute for Gordon-Levitt on screen, it takes a moment to register the change. He's well backed by Shailene Woodley, who brings a fresh, teasing playfulness to her role as Snowden's girlfriend Lindsay Mills; easy to see how she'd have beguiled the shy, inhibited young man. Nicolas Cage shows up, in uncharacteristically restrained form, as a disillusioned dissident within the system whose ideas sow slow-germinating seeds in Snowden's mind, and Rhys Ifans lends a welcome touch of the Mephistophelean as Corbin O'Brian, Snowden's instructor and mentor. Towards the end of the film, as he senses his former protégé slipping away from him, O'Brian appears on a video link, his huge long face looming over Snowden's slight figure like some frustrated Svengali.

The film is not without moments of sly



Life in exile: Joseph Gordon-Levitt

## The Son of Joseph

France/Belgium 2016  
Director: Eugène Green  
Certificate 12A 113m 20s



Mistaken identity: Eugène Green, Victor Ezenfis

See Feature  
on page 36

### Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Early on in Eugène Green's *The Son of Joseph*, teenager Vincent (Victor Ezenfis), hoping to meet Oscar (Mathieu Amalric), the father he's never known, slips into a book launch being held by Oscar's publishing company. Wearing a screwed-in-place scowl, Vincent soaks up the inane cocktail-party banter of bohemian mountebanks – the clueless hyping of a made-up author as “the next Céline”, the airy pronouncement by Oscar that “all art is subversive”.

Green first appeared on the scene with *Toutes les nuits* in 2001, when the so-called New French Extremity was enjoying its ‘subversive’ heyday. Then as now Green was an outlier, by virtue of his age (he was already north of 50), nationality (he is a long-ago-transplanted American) and his complete indifference to *épater le bourgeois* feints. His films celebrate the transmission and preservation of knowledge, not heedlessly upsetting the apple cart, and at heart *The Son of Joseph* is, like his recent *La Sapienza* (2014), concerned with the mutually transformative relationships between mentor and mentee.

If Green can be said to have a master himself it must be the filmmaker to whom he is most frequently likened: Robert Bresson. The comparison is helpful inasmuch as it gives a novice some idea of what his movies are like – performances that eschew whatever the current tenets of realism are, a tendency towards flat and rather austere framing – though it also leaves a lot out. Green's films have a singular placidity in their stillness, and he is much more of the absurdist comedian than the Jansenist Bresson, dealing here with mistaken identities, boudoir farce and a subplot involving online sperm sales. Yes, at one point a donkey shows up in *The Son of Joseph*, but this doesn't signify a homage to *Au hasard Balthazar* (1966) so much as it does the common frame of reference and iconographic signification Green and Bresson share, which is that of the Christian church. (The story of Abraham and Isaac is the principal source material here, with Caravaggio's rendition the dominant decoration in Vincent's bedroom.)

If there is any respect in which Green truly resembles Bresson it's in his dauntlessness,

the manner in which he has pursued his own preoccupations and creative strategies singlemindedly and solitarily – solitude being a theme he frequently returns to. Unlike Bresson, Green has no problem reusing actors – regular Adrien Michaux is here, briefly, and in the more expansive role of Oscar's brother Joseph, who becomes a much needed friend to Vincent, is one of the stars of *La Sapienza*, Fabrizio Rongione, also a favourite of Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne, credited as producers. Working with a clout he's rarely enjoyed in the past, Green shows that he doesn't share Bresson's dislike of established stars: in addition to Amalric we have an incandescent Natacha Régnier as Vincent's mother Marie, and Maria de Medeiros as a flustered, brittle literary critic alarmed to learn of the death of Nathalie Sarraute.

Green drills his performers one and all in a style of declarative delivery that is measured and phonetically ultra-precise but never stiff or inexpressive, with lines often disarmingly delivered face-forward to the camera. When first introduced, Vincent seems to exist under a perpetual cloud, but his relationship with Joseph brings the light bursting through. Green's films give meaning to the notion of ‘seeing the good in people’ – throughout them you will find characters wearing an expression of tender happiness that makes it seem as if the bearer is in possession of a wonderful secret they're bursting to share – which is at the very core of *The Son of Joseph*.

In what Oscar calls the “youth and audacity” of the writers he cultivates, Joseph diagnoses “despair and cynicism”, and together he and Vincent, with whom he shares a sympathetic temperament and a weakness for awful puns, embark on a process of mutual rejuvenation. Vincent discovers his youth as for the first time, which refreshes Joseph; and Joseph in turn teaches Vincent how to see – scenes of him directing his pupil before Georges de La Tour's *St Joseph the Carpenter* echo the guided tours of Francesco Borromini's architectural masterpieces given by Rongione in *La Sapienza*. A builder of sorts himself, Green gives prime importance to harmoniousness of form, and his film ends with a radical reconstruction of the same set of figures that it begins



humour. Early on it's established that Snowden likes to fiddle with a Rubik's cube, solving it without even looking at it. Having taken his crucial decision he then downloads the data on to a memory stick and conceals it inside a compartment of the cube – which he casually tosses to the security guards as he leaves, as if to say, “Go on, try it!” They fail, of course, and toss it back to him – *after* he's been through the security scan. But altogether *Snowden* reinforces the impression left by the director's last few films – *World Trade Center*, *W.*, *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps* – that much of the fire has gone out of Stone's belly. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Moritz Borman  
Fernando Sulichin  
Philip Schulz-Deyle  
Eric Kopeloff

#### Screenplay

Kieran Fitzgerald  
Oliver Stone  
Based upon the book *The Time of the Octopus* by Anatoly Kucherenka  
Based on the Guardian book by Luke Harding

#### Director of Photography

Anthony Dod Mantle

#### Film Editors

Alex Marquez  
Lee Percy

#### Production Designer

Mark Tildesley

#### Music

Craig Armstrong  
Sound Mixer  
Frank Heidbrink

#### Costume Designer

Bina Daigeler

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#### Production Companies

Open Road Films and  
Endgame present  
in association with  
Wild Bunch, Vendian  
Entertainment,  
TG Media  
A Sacha Inc.,  
KrautPack  
Entertainment  
GmbH & Co. KG, trf  
telenormfilm GmbH  
co-production

#### Executive Producers

Bahman Naraghi  
José Ibáñez  
Max Arvelaiz  
Tom Ortenberg  
Peter Lawson  
James Stern  
Douglas Hansen  
Christopher Woodrow  
Michael Bassick

#### Cast

Joseph  
Gordon-Levitt  
Edward Snowden

#### Shailene Woodley

Lindsay Mills  
Melissa Leo  
Laura Poitras  
Zachary Quinto  
Glenn Greenwald  
Tom Wilkinson  
Ewen MacAskill  
Scott Eastwood  
Trevor James  
Logan Marshall-Green

male drone pilot  
Timothy Olyphant  
CIA agent Geneva

#### Ben Schnetzer

Gabriel Sol  
Lakeith Lee  
Stanfield  
Patrick Haynes  
Rhys Ifans  
Corbin O'Brian  
Nicolas Cage  
Hank Forrester

Dolby Digital  
In Colour  
[2.35:1]

Distributor  
Vertigo Films

**Hong Kong, June 2013.** Edward Snowden, CIA/NSA operative turned whistleblower, meets with Ewen MacAskill and Glenn Greenwald of the ‘Guardian’ newspaper and documentary-maker Laura Poitras, to explain why he felt impelled to make public the huge US government cyber-surveillance programme. Poitras films the encounter.

Flashbacks take us through the previous decade of Snowden's career. Scion of a military family, he joins the US Army Reserve but is invalided out when he breaks his leg. He joins the CIA, where his exceptional programming abilities soon become evident to his instructor, Corbin O'Brian. Posted to Washington DC, Snowden meets photographer Lindsay Mills on a dating site. Despite their political differences – Lindsay is a steadfast liberal – they are soon in a relationship. Rapidly promoted and entrusted with ever more confidential assignments, Snowden is posted successively to Geneva, Tokyo and Hawaii. In Geneva, colleague Gabriel shows him how the near-universal US surveillance can be used to spy on virtually anybody anywhere, and attempts to enlist him in a scam targeting a rich Pakistani businessman. This and other incidents increase Snowden's misgivings about the work he's involved in, and cause strain in his relationship with Lindsay. Finally, seeing the results of computer-controlled drone attacks, he decides to download the whole US surveillance programme on to a memory stick and go public with it. He flees to Hong Kong, where he gives his interview to the ‘Guardian’. The interview is published, along with Snowden's classified information, sparking furious official denunciations. Snowden escapes to Moscow, where Lindsay joins him.



with: a couple, a lone figure and an animal. The first configuration includes Vincent, two twisted teenagers and the trapped rat they are tormenting with long needles in a dingy hideaway. The last includes Vincent, his newly united parents and that gentle donkey walking in open air. What a pleasure it is to step into the light. 🍷

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Francine Jacob  
Didier Jacob  
**Screenplay/**  
**Dialogue**  
Eugène Green  
**Director of**  
**Photography**  
Raphaël O'Byrne  
**Editor**  
Valérie Loiseleux  
**Art Director**  
Paul Rouschop  
**Sound**  
Benoît De Clerck  
Stéphane Thiébaud  
**Costumes**  
Agnès Noden

©Coffee and Films/  
Les Films du Fleuve  
**Production**  
**Companies**  
Coffee and Films,  
Les Films du Fleuve  
present with the  
participation of  
Centre National  
du Cinéma et de  
l'Image Animée  
and the support of  
Région Ile-de-France  
in partnership with  
CNC, Tax Shelter  
du Gouvernement  
Fédéral Belge, Casa  
Kafka Pictures,  
Belfius in association  
with Arte/Cofinova  
12 a film by  
Eugène Green  
A Coffee and Films,  
Les Films du Fleuve,  
Film Factory, TSF, En

haut des marches  
co-production  
In association with  
Arte/Cofinova  
12, Film Factory,  
VOO et Be tv, Casa  
Kafka Pictures  
With the support of  
Olivier Boré de Loisy  
**Executive Producer**  
- Belgium  
Delphine Tomson

#### Cast

**Victor Ezenfis**  
Vincent  
**Natacha Régnier**  
Marie  
**Fabrizio Rongione**  
Joseph  
**Mathieu Amalric**  
Oscar Pormenor  
**Maria de Medeiros**  
Violette Tréfoille  
**Julia de Gasquet**  
Bernadette  
**Anne-Guésande**  
**Ledoux**  
Madame Pormenor  
**Félix Debraux**  
Dean  
**Sophie Delage**  
Charlotte Sentombot  
**Manuel Weber**  
waiter at the  
Clovis hotel  
**Bérénice**  
**Piéjus-Morel**  
Madeleine  
**Marie-Anne Mestre**  
cook  
**Quentin Levi**  
doorman

**Alexandra Fournier**  
secretary at  
Éditions Apoa  
**Pierre Hiessler**  
police officer  
**Tom Gaspar-**  
**Darmon**  
1st boy  
**Oleg Ossina**  
2nd boy  
**Eugène Green**  
concierge at the  
Clovis hotel  
**Claire Lefilliâtre**  
singer  
**Vincent Dumestre**  
lute player  
**Louise Moaty**  
actress  
**Benjamin Lazar**  
director  
**Christelle Prot**  
Philomène  
**Adrien Michaux**  
Philibert  
**Jacques Bonnaffé**  
farmer

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]  
**Subtitles**

**Distributor**  
MUBI  
  
French theatrical title  
**Le Fils de Joseph**

Paris, present day. Vincent, a glum teenager, badgers his mother Marie for information as to the identity of his father, to no avail. He searches his mother's personal effects and discovers the name of Oscar Pormenor, a successful publisher. Vincent sneaks into a book launch Pormenor is hosting, then breaks into his office, where he listens in on his infidelities. On another occasion Vincent surprises Oscar in his office and prepares to cut his throat, taking inspiration from a print of Caravaggio's 'The Sacrifice of Isaac', but can't follow through. Fleeing the scene, Vincent bumps into a middle-aged man named Joseph. Unbeknown to Vincent, Joseph is Oscar's poor brother – Oscar has just refused him a loan to buy property in their ancestral Normandy. Joseph takes a kindly interest in Vincent, and they become fast friends, visiting the Louvre and strolling through churches together. Vincent invites Joseph over to dinner. Joseph and Marie subsequently go on a date, eventually making plans to visit Normandy with Vincent. Joseph invites them to see the house he grew up in, sneaking around to avoid a party being thrown by his brother, who has arrived from Paris. Vincent finds himself face to face with Oscar, who recognises him as his attacker and sends for the police. Oscar, Joseph and Marie are cornered by the authorities on the beach. On recognising his brother and understanding the situation, Oscar says he's mistaken and Vincent is not in fact his attacker. Joseph accepts responsibility for Vincent as a father; they and Marie walk away as a family.

## Trolls

USA 2016

Director: Mike Mitchell

Certificate U 92m 19s

### Reviewed by Alex Dudok de Wit

In 1959, a penniless Danish woodworker carved an odd little figurine for his daughter. Drawing inspiration from Nordic folklore, Thomas Dam gave it a pot belly and a head of straight carded hair. The toy caught the eyes of local kids, who clamoured for one. Within a year, Dam was exporting millions of Good Luck Trolls, as he aptly named them.

There is something touchingly accidental about the birth of Trolls, but this was all but engulfed in the subsequent rush to commercialise the dolls. As their popularity flagged in the 1990s, they were cynically repackaged first for boys – I owned the dire Super Nintendo game – and then for girls, with the unlabeled 2005 animated series *Trollz*. And now this: a last-ditch attempt by DreamWorks to sell the ugly-cute characters to a generation that doesn't remember the above-mentioned abominations.

The gamble may yet pay off, as *Trolls* is by no means a stinker. Building on previous franchise outings, it spins a credible backstory for the coiffed critters. In brief: the Trolls live in a communitarian utopia where they spend their time "hugging, singing and dancing" (cue a string of smart musical gags culminating in a freaky Lionel Richie cover). But once a year their Edenic wonderland is disturbed by the Bergens – repulsive ogres who have their own definition of happiness: a tasty Troll for dinner.

The film follows two Trolls, Poppy and Branch, as they head to Bergen Town to rescue some kidnapped friends. For reasons eventually disclosed, Branch is the only Troll who isn't permanently blissed-out, his pessimism clashing with Poppy's relentless good cheer; when she invites him to join her in a singalong, he replies flatly, "I don't sing." There is something of *Inside Out*'s Joy and Sadness in their dynamic. But where Pixar's film argued that sadness has value, *Trolls* doesn't attempt such a subversive message, ultimately taking the



Dinner time: Trolls

hoary Disney – dare I say, American – view that negative emotions are there to be banished.

Nor is this the only aspect of *Trolls* that is a little passé. The Justin Timberlake-curated soundtrack, a medley of remixed disco classics, blatantly attempts to channel the on-trend grooviness of the *Shrek* films (co-director Mike Mitchell is an alumnus of the series). The screenwriters behind *Kung Fu Panda* try to keep things relevant with a token Bechdel relationship and wink-wink references to the dolls' cultural heritage, but even this parent-friendly brand of irony is somewhat dated: *The Lego Movie* perfected it, and sort of killed it. The plot holds no surprises. Only when the animators explore the dark lysergic undertones of the Trolls' technicolor universe – a scene that substitutes rainbows for blood comes to mind – does the film feel fresh.

*Trolls* is professional, predictable and blandly fun: in short, the antithesis of Dam's artisanal naivety. While pleasing its target audience, it will swell that growing trend in children's cinema to prioritise brand over ideas. Furbies make a cameo appearance in the film – how long before they get a mega-budget CGI vehicle of their own? 🍷

### Credits and Synopsis

**Co-director**  
Walt Dohrn  
**Produced by**  
Gina Shay  
**Screenplay**  
Jonathan Aibel  
Glenn Berger  
**Story**  
Erica Rivinoja  
Based on the Good  
Luck Trolls created  
by Thomas Dam  
**Editor**  
Nick Fletcher  
**Production Designer**  
Kendal Cronkrite-  
Shaindlin  
**Original Score**  
Christophe Beck  
**Supervising**  
**Sound Editors/**  
**Sound Designers**  
Ethan Van der Ryn  
Erik Aadahl  
**Animation**  
**Supervisors**  
Prashanth Cavale  
Mark Donald  
Antony Gray  
John Hill  
Jason Reisig  
Benjamin Willis

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Animation LLC  
**Production**  
**Companies**  
Twentieth Century  
Fox, Dreamworks  
Animation SKG  
**Executive Producer**  
Dannie Festa

#### Voice Cast

**Anna Kendrick**  
Poppy  
**Justin Timberlake**  
Branch  
**Zooey Deschanel**  
Bridget  
**Christopher**  
**Mintz-Plassé**  
King Gristle  
**Christine Baranski**  
Chef  
**Russell Brand**  
Creek  
**James Corden**  
Biggie  
**Jeffrey Tambor**  
King Peppy  
**Ron Funches**  
Cooper  
**Caroline Hjelt**  
Cherille

**Aino Jawo**  
Satin  
**Kunal Nayyar**  
Guy Diamond  
**Quvenzhané Wallis**  
Harper  
**John Cleese**  
King Gristle Sr  
**Gwen Stefani**  
DJ Suki

**Dolby Atmos**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

Some screenings  
presented in 3D

**Distributor**  
20th Century Fox  
International (UK)

The peace of the Trolls' forestland utopia is disturbed once a year, when the Bergens feast on them as part of an annual tradition. One year, as King Gristle prepares to eat his first Troll, the creatures flee underground. Furious, Gristle banishes the chef in charge of the feast.

Twenty years later, in the Trolls' new home, Princess Poppy hosts a party to commemorate their escape. The music alerts the chef, who has been searching for the Trolls ever since her ostracism. She abducts a few and brings them back to Gristle, now king of Bergen Town. Gristle is overjoyed and makes the chef his consigliere.

Poppy sets out with her moody companion Branch to save her friends, while the remaining Trolls hide. Arriving in Bergen Town, the pair learn that the prisoners are being guarded by Bridget, a maid who secretly loves Gristle. They strike a deal: Bridget sets the Trolls free, and in exchange they disguise her and help her charm Gristle. One Troll, Creek, is missing. Bridget explains that Creek told Gristle where the Trolls were hiding, in return for protection from being eaten. The Bergens capture the Trolls, including Poppy's crew, and prepare for a feast. Bridget sets them free again and faces the Bergens, ready to be punished. But the Trolls, loyal to their new friend, intervene and convince the Bergens that there is more to happiness than eating other creatures. Bridget is forgiven; the chef is banished once more.

## Uncle Howard

United Kingdom/USA/Mexico 2016

Director: Aaron Brookner

Certificate 15 97m 6s

### Reviewed by Tony Rayns

Aaron Brookner was seven years old when he lost his gay uncle Howard to an Aids-related cancer in 1989, and he has devoted much of his time and energy in recent years to rescuing Howard's work and reputation from oblivion. His first palpable achievement was finding and rereleasing Howard's *Burroughs: The Movie*, a surprisingly intimate portrait of the writer William Burroughs; next up, according to the press-kit, will be Howard's second documentary *Robert Wilson and the Civil Wars* (1987). In the meantime Aaron's releasing this sprawling account of his uncle's life, work and death. He hopes to establish Howard Brookner as a worthy contemporary of the likes of Jim Jarmusch and Tom DiCillo, seeing all of them as exemplars of the boho New York arts scene of the late 1970s and 1980s.

Since Howard's was one of very many careers cut short by Aids, it's impossible to know if he would have proved to be one of NYU's brightest alumni. It was certainly an achievement for a smart young film-school student to charm his way into Burroughs's circle and to persuade the writer and his friends to trust him enough to grant him sit-down interviews and allow him to shoot *vérité* footage of their social interactions. It obviously helped that Howard was gay (Burroughs became more militantly queer when he moved from London to New York in the late 1970s, in sync with the Gay Liberation movement) but he evidently put his subjects



Time capsule: Howard Brookner

at ease in a way that went beyond questions of sexual orientation. Something similar happened with theatre director Robert Wilson, focus of Howard's next project, and with Madonna and Matt Dillon, stars of Howard's Damon Runyon musical *Bloodhounds of Broadway*. All of this is documented in *Uncle Howard*, sometimes in rather scrappy fragments, but not enough finished work is available for evaluation to be sure that Howard Brookner was becoming a significant filmmaker at the time of his death.

It's to Aaron Brookner's credit that he realises he needs to go beyond building (or reclaiming) his late uncle's reputation. His retrieval of all the outtakes from *Burroughs: The Movie* – they are found carefully stored in Burroughs's former New York apartment, known as 'The Bunker', now owner-occupied by the initially uncooperative poet John Giorno – showed him the way forward. The material proved to be a time capsule, capturing not only New York's boho society circa 1980 but also now-vanished aspects of the city's topography, including Warhol's original 'Factory', the old Chelsea Hotel and the old St Vincent's Hospital, where New York's first HIV+ patients were treated. (The site of the latter is now a tower of luxury condos.) This means that *Uncle Howard* features cameo appearances by everyone from Patti Smith and Frank Zappa to Spike Lee, John Cage and Merce Cunningham; the list goes on. It also means that the film shows a time when NYC was an affordable haven for avant-garde artists and misfits.

Inevitably most viewers will find the documentary more engaging as a touchstone for a particular social-cultural history than as a portrait of one individual. But the accounts of Howard Brookner's worsening health by Brad Gooch and James Grauerholz – and by Howard himself in a rediscovered video diary – are genuinely touching too. **S**

## The White Knights

France/Belgium 2015

Director: Joachim Lafosse

Certificate 12A 112m 8s

### Reviewed by Catherine Wheatley

#### Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

Belgian director Joachim Lafosse has been building a reputation as a gifted portraitist of familial dysfunction, with films such as *Private Property* (2006), his breakthrough study of single motherhood, and the divorce drama *After Love*, rightly celebrated at Cannes this year in Directors' Fortnight. *The White Knights*, made in 2015 but only now receiving a UK release, has most in common with *Our Children* (2012), his chilling portrait of a young woman driven to take terrible action by her overbearing father-in-law, though the trail of devastation wrought by good intentions gone awry runs throughout all his films.

However, with this study of aid workers in Africa (loosely inspired by the 2007 Zoe's Ark scandal, in which NGO volunteers were implicated in the abduction of more than 100 children from Darfur, leading to their eventual arrest), Lafosse moves on to a much larger stage. *The White Knights* opens on a broad desert plain, where a group of French aid workers are setting up camp. Led by the solid, capable Jacques (Vincent Lindon), they are in this anonymous African country to collect orphaned children and take them back to France, where they will be adopted by well-meaning families.

It seems a noble mission. Soon enough, though, we are mired in a moral morass. The team meet with African village chiefs who – perhaps dazzled by the money Jacques is offering as a 'gift' – fail to ensure that the children they offer up are indeed parentless. Meanwhile the parents back home are getting antsy, and Jacques must deal with a snakelike fixer, Xavier (*A Prophet*'s Reda Kateb), who may or may not be sabotaging the mission. Most problematically, the aid workers have led the villagers to believe that the children will remain in care centres in Africa. Does the end justify the means, as Jacques so vehemently claims? We're so used to seeing Lindon as the put-upon good guy – a persona Lafosse plays up in the opening sections of the film – that the dawning realisation that his intentions might be misguided, to put it mildly, is very unsettling.

*The White Knights* adeptly skewers the white man's messiah complex, then. But if this muscular thriller has any message it is that no one can claim innocence in the face of such a great bloody mess, least of all those "writing cheques from the safety of their own sofa", as Jacques puts it. Western audiences find an ersatz of sorts in journalist Françoise (Valérie Donzelli), who is documenting the team's work, and who pleads press neutrality at her convenience. Like the viewer, Françoise finds out what's happening by fits and starts. By contrast, Bintou, the team's inscrutable translator (newcomer Rougulta Bintou Saleh) is both their dupe and their undoing, her final, dreadful vengeance brought about by their arrogant assumption that she will support their cause despite their deceit.

Switching between frenetic handheld footage of fieldwork and long, static shots of the empty camp, Lafosse and DP Jean-François Hensgens viscerally capture the tensions, frustrations and longueurs of aid work, and as the film builds to a panicky climax we find ourselves rooting, even now, for Jacques and his team. The closing

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Paula Vaccaro  
**Cinematography**  
André Döbert  
Gregg de Domenico  
**Editor**  
Masahiro Hirakubo  
**Sound Recordists and Mixers**  
Diana Sagrista  
Alberto Muñoz  
  
©Pinball London  
**Production Companies**

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in association with  
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Jerome Foundation,  
The Filmmaker  
Fund, IFP, Bertha  
Foundation,  
Itaca Films  
A Pinball London  
production  
A film by Aaron  
Brookner  
**Executive Producer**  
Jim Jarmusch

**In Colour**  
[1.78:1]

**Distributor**  
Contemporary Films

**A documentary essay on the life and work of Howard Brookner (1954-1989) by his nephew Aaron, who was seven at the time of his uncle's death. The starting point is the rediscovery of Howard's 1983 documentary 'Burroughs: The Movie', a portrait of the writer William S. Burroughs begun as a graduation project at NYU, now released on Blu-ray; the recovery of the film became possible when Aaron found a print archived at MoMA and picture and sound rushes securely stored in Burroughs's former New York apartment. Aaron goes on to retrieve Howard's follow-up documentary on the theatre director Robert Wilson (materials are found in Germany) and finds rehearsal footage from Howard's debut fiction feature 'Bloodhounds of Broadway' (1989, based on Damon Runyon), which starred Madonna and Matt Dillon. He also finds some video diaries shot by Howard in which he reflects on the impact of the Aids epidemic on an entire generation of New York artists and shares his fears (later confirmed) that he is himself HIV+. As well as recovered film and video footage the film includes interviews with Howard's mother, Burroughs's heir James Grauerholz, Jim Jarmusch and Tom DiCillo (who both worked on 'Burroughs: The Movie'), Robert Wilson and various friends, lovers and associates of the late filmmaker.**



← moments are almost unwatchable. Set to the soundtrack of children's frightened wails, the final shot captures, to cauterising effect, the ultimate futility of both the mission and Bintou's condemnation of it, leaving us with a devastating image of abandoned hope. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Sylvie Pialat  
Jacques-Henri  
Bronckart  
Olivier Bronckart  
**Screenplay**  
Joachim Lafosse  
Thomas van Zuylen  
Bulle Decarpentries  
**Screenplay**  
Collaboration  
Thomas Bidegain  
Zélia Abadie  
Jérôme Beaujour  
Loosely based  
on Sarkozy dans  
l'avion? Les Zozos  
de la Françafrique  
by François-Xavier  
Pinte, Geoffroy  
d'Ursel  
**Director of  
Photography**  
Jean-François  
Hensgens  
**Editors**  
Sophie Vercruysse  
Yann Dedet  
**Art Director**  
Olivier Radot  
**Sound**  
Christophe  
Giovannoni  
Ingrid Simon  
Valérie Le Docte  
Thomas Gauder  
**Costume Designer**  
Pascale Chavanne

@Les Films du  
Worso, Versus  
Production, France  
3 Cinéma, Le  
Pacte, RTBF  
**Production  
Companies**  
Versus Production  
and Les Films du  
Worso present a film  
by Joachim Lafosse  
A Versus Production,  
Les Films du Worso,  
France 3 Cinéma,  
BNP Paribas Fortis  
Film Finance, Le  
Pacte, Prime Time,

RTBF (Télévision  
Belge), Proximus  
co-production  
With the  
participation of  
Canal+, Ciné+,  
France Télévisions  
With the support  
of Tax Shelter du  
Gouvernement  
Fédéral de Belgique,  
Inver Invest  
In association with  
Indie Sales Company  
and Indie Invest,  
Soficinéma 10  
With the support  
of Eurimages,  
La Wallonie,  
La région de  
Bruxelles-Capitale,  
Programme MEDIA  
de la Communauté  
Européenne  
With the assistance  
of Centre du Cinéma  
et de l'Audiovisuel  
de la Fédération  
Wallonie-Bruxelles  
and VOO, Fonds  
Audiovisuel de  
Flandre (VAF)  
With the  
participation  
of Cinéfeel  
Prod, O'Brother  
Distribution  
Developed with the  
support of Mars  
Films, Cofinova  
Développement  
7, CNC, l'Angoa  
**Executive Producer**  
Gwennaelle Libert

**Cast**  
**Vincent Lindon**  
Jacques Arnault  
**Valérie Donzelli**  
Françoise Dubois  
**Louise Bourgoïn**  
Laura Turine  
**Reda Kateb**  
Xavier Libert  
**Stéphane Bisson**

An unnamed African country, the present. French aid worker Jacques Arnault and his team set up a camp, where they intend to gather some 300 orphans. They are shadowed by journalist Françoise. Unbeknown to the locals, including translator Bintou, Jacques and his team are planning to fly the children back to France, where they will be adopted by French families. Tensions within the team worsen when it transpires that one of the children in their care isn't an orphan; four workers abandon the project. Jacques vows that he will authenticate the provenance of the 'orphans' in their care, but he also accepts several children from parents who feel unable to care for them. Françoise finds her journalistic impartiality compromised when she forms a bond with one of the children, Ismael.

On the eve of their departure for France, Jacques confesses his deceit to Bintou, who subsequently disappears. Fearing that she has gone to the authorities, the team race with the children to their waiting plane, but are apprehended en route by armed guards. The team, including Françoise, are arrested, leaving the children stranded.

## You've Been Trumped Too

United Kingdom 2016  
Director: Anthony Baxter  
Certificate PG 78m 49s

### Reviewed by Violet Lucca

Anthony Baxter's second feature-length crusade against Donald Trump is as badly shaped as its target. Ostensibly picking up where 2011's *You've Been Trumped* left off, Baxter's sequel is an inferior remake of his previous film, rushed to completion as a public service to the American people and released just before the US election. Yet as is true of the vast majority of issue-driven documentaries, only the message, not the quality, matters. Trump's supporters have been willing to interpret his history of tax evasion, exploiting contractors/employees and misappropriation of funds through the Trump Foundation as business acumen (and defend his blatantly xenophobic, racist and sexually aggressive statements), so why would this self-righteous smear convince them to change their vote so late in the game?

And, as certain encounters in *You've Been Trumped Too* demonstrate, those who white-knuckled their #MAGA signs wouldn't allow themselves to be swayed by a sob story as clear-cut as that of Molly and Michael Forbes. The Scottish mother and son refused to sell their croft to Trump when he was building his Balmedie golf course in Aberdeenshire (on formerly environmentally protected land), and had no water in their homes for five years. A pipe providing their fresh spring water – located on Trump's property – was 'accidentally' destroyed during construction, which forced the elderly Molly to use bottled water to drink and bathe with. When the filmmaker, channelling Michael Moore (who got his own anti-Trump doc, *Michael Moore in TrumpLand*, out before 8 November), stormed the company's offices in 2011 and demanded concrete details of the pipe's repair, a Scottish Trump representative assured him in perfect Trumpese: "It'll be the best system for supplying water to his house he's ever had." Baxter and his producer were soon arrested for trespassing, and this not-so harrowing footage is replayed several times in *You've Been Trumped Too*, for gravitas. (Baxter's theatrical screams as he's being hauled off tread the line between cringe and humour.)

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Richard Phinney  
**Written by**  
Richard Phinney  
**Cinematography**  
Anthony Baxter  
**Edited by**  
Anthony Baxter  
**Original Score**  
Dominic Glynn  
**Re-recording Mixer**  
Will McConnell

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Pictures Limited  
**Production**

**Companies**  
Montrose Pictures  
and Creative  
Scotland present  
in association with  
Northern Ireland  
Screen a film by  
Anthony Baxter  
A Montrose Pictures  
presentation  
Supported by the  
National Lottery  
through Creative  
Scotland  
Produced with  
funding from

Northern Ireland  
Screen  
**Executive Producer**  
Mark Thomas  
**Film Extracts**  
*You've Been  
Trumped* (2011)

**In Colour**  
[178:1]

**Distributor**  
Montrose Pictures

A documentary using news clips, original interviews and footage from the 2011 film *You've Been Trumped* to revisit the plight of Molly and Michael Forbes, a mother and son who refused to sell their land to Donald Trump for his Balmedie golf course near Aberdeen and had the supply of water to their property cut off for five years. The film also explores a variety of Trump's past scandals and broken promises to the local government of Aberdeen.



Donald Trump, Anthony Baxter

Some other old footage also gets recycled, but because it's not identified as such, we sometimes can't tell what's new. (Cute biographical info is recycled too: Molly tells the camera that she likes to play a radio to keep foxes away from her hen house – just as she did in the first doc.)

Of course, it's difficult to come up with something new when the message is 'Trump doesn't change'. Baxter contrasts Molly's lifetime of keeping her cows' tails looking bonny with Donald Trump Jr's big-game hunting, but he performs an even bigger stretch by connecting the Forbes family's problems with the ongoing water crisis in Flint, Michigan. Baxter's implication that Trump should've done something about the Flint situation is patently absurd. Barack Obama hasn't been able to do anything about it either – just as you can't simply reallocate £350m from the EU to the NHS, so a solution to Flint's problem (estimated at \$5m) can't come directly from the executive office. Governor Rick Snyder's decision to cut costs by switching the city's water supply caused deaths and long-term health problems for an entire city, and speaks to larger infrastructure problems for low-income communities in the US; Trump picking on two ageing people in Aberdeen is a fundamentally different type of injustice allowed by capitalism. (The documentary also shows Michael fixing the broken pipe with friends over the course of a few hours; why he waited to take action is undisclosed.)

Another great leap, though one that offers some greater historical value, is Michael's trip to the Republican National Convention in July. During the convention, the area around the Quicken Loans Arena in Cleveland was divided into a 'hard' security perimeter and a 'secondary event area', which is where Baxter's cameras were allowed to record. We see the varieties of protesters present – some channelling performance-art techniques, others hawking overpriced anti-Trump merch – and then Trump's supporters, who tell Michael they'll need to hear both sides before making up their minds about the situation. (One woman informs him that his plight is nothing compared with eight years under Obama's tyranny.) It's clear that these protesters were woefully unprepared to appeal to Trump's supporters, who – unlike this documentary – didn't stop being relevant after 9 November. **S**





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# Home cinema



Evelyn Preer and Jack Chenault in Oscar Micheaux's second feature *Within Our Gates* (1920), the oldest surviving feature by a black director

## ANOTHER COUNTRY

A landmark collection of early 'race movies' by African American filmmakers offers a treasure trove of enormous value and variety

### PIONEERS OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN CINEMA

**TWO KNIGHTS OF VAUDEVILLE / MERCY THE MUMMY MUMBLED / A RECKLESS ROVER / WITHIN OUR GATES / THE SYMBOL OF THE UNCONQUERED: A STORY OF THE KU KLUX KLAN / BY RIGHT OF BIRTH / BODY AND SOUL / REGENERATION / THE FLYING ACE / TEN NIGHTS IN A BAR ROOM / REV. S.S. JONES HOME MOVIES / THE SCAR OF SHAME / ELEVEN P.M. / HELL-BOUND TRAIN / VERDICT NOT GUILTY / HEAVEN-BOUND TRAVELERS / THE DARKTOWN REVUE / THE EXILE / HOT BISKITS / THE GIRL FROM CHICAGO / TEN MINUTES TO LIVE / VEILED ARISTOCRATS / BIRTHRIGHT / THE BRONZE BUCKAROO / ZORA NEALE HURSTON FIELDWORK FOOTAGE (EXCERPT) / COMMANDMENT KEEPER CHURCH, BEAUFORT SOUTH CAROLINA, MAY 1940 (EXCERPT) / THE BLOOD OF JESUS / DIRTY GERTIE FROM HARLEM U.S.A.**

Richard Norman, Richard Maurice, Spencer Williams, Oscar Micheaux et al.; US 1915-46; BFI Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD; 952 minutes; Features: Musical scores by DJ Spooky, Max Roach, Alloy Orchestra, Samuel Waymon, Donald Sosin and others; contemporary interviews with historians and film preservationists; 80-page booklet

#### Reviewed by James Bell

As early cinema expanded across America, it did so into a country riven by racial divisions. The 'separate but equal' Jim Crow laws that imposed segregation of public spaces in the South didn't make an exception for Nickelodeons or any other space used to show films, and as a consequence 'black only' theatres soon emerged. The divisions may not have been so absolute in the Northern states, but *de facto* segregation in cities like Chicago meant that spaces that showed films in predominantly black areas naturally catered to mainly black audiences.

But what to show to them? Hollywood productions were popular, despite the racist attitudes that underpinned most – as per film historian Donald Bogle's formulation, most black characters in early and studio-era Hollywood films fell into one of five pernicious stereotypes, the "toms, coons, mammies, mulattoes and

bucks". But many black audiences, not to mention many ambitious black filmmakers, naturally also wanted to make and see films that were free of those compromises, a cinema that would speak to and reflect life and cinematic tastes from their own perspective.

It was in this environment that so-called race movies emerged – independent films made by pioneering (mostly) black producers and directors, aimed at black audiences, and supported by exhibition in black-only spaces. The heyday of the race movie spanned the mid-1910s until the late 40s, and it is films from this period that are collected in this landmark new five-disc DVD and Blu-ray box-set, the result of a crowdfunded initiative by the Kino Lorber label in the US, now released in the UK by the BFI. The collection is a treasure trove of enormous value and revelatory variety, with inclusions ranging from silent comedy shorts to documentaries and amateur film; Hollywood-aping genre titles to sober melodramas that tackle racial questions from a perspective just not found in Hollywood at the time. Its significance for expanding a wider understanding of American cinema history can hardly be overstated.

The earliest inclusion is *Two Knights of Vaudeville* (1915), a slapstick in the Mack Sennett vein made by the African American producer Luther Pollard for the (white-owned) Ebony Film Corporation, in which three black friends enter in to the white space of a theatre after finding tickets a well-heeled white gentleman has dropped in the street. Afterwards, the friends put on their own variety show in an all-black theatre. As film historian Charles Musser, one of the curators of the collection, notes, the film is an early example of how race films acknowledged the "colour line" that W.E.B. Du Bois said divided American life, even as (in this particular case) the film offers a fantasy of transgressing that line.

The charged issue of race is inescapably felt in most of the films here, albeit it in very different ways and with varying degrees of emphasis – indicative of the sheer range of material produced in the period. Some films tackle race thematically, while others offer more escapist entertainment, where the existence of racism in America can be read only implicitly through the filmmakers so obviously and consciously omitting any mention of it on screen – the presence of an absence, so to speak. In the genre films made by companies like the Florida-based Norman film company, for instance, the exclusionary prejudices of Hollywood are suggested by the recasting of mainstream generic conventions into a fantasy all-black milieu. Thus, in *The Flying Ace* (1926), a mystery adventure about a fighter pilot, the action unfolds without a white face in sight.

The very existence of such genre titles is fascinating to consider. Decades before the blaxploitation era in the 1970s switched white characters for black in affirmative spins on Hollywood genre formulas, race movies had done similar. Unfortunately very few of these early genre race films survive, which makes the inclusion of a four-minute fragment from the



Oscar Micheaux at work

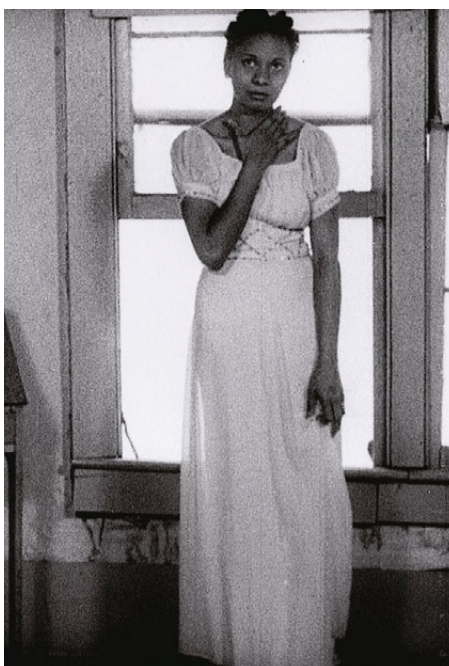
seafaring thriller *Regeneration* (1923) all the more welcome, despite it being almost completely consumed with nitrate decomposition. Genre-based race films continued into the sound era, as witnessed by the inclusion here of *The Bronze Buckaroo* (1939), one of a number of all-black westerns starring 'the Sepia Singing Cowboy' Herbert Jeffrey (later to sing with Duke Ellington).

However the name at the centre of the collection, quite rightly, is the writer, director, producer and entrepreneur Oscar Micheaux, the most prolific and successful of the race movie filmmakers, who between 1918-48 directed more than 40 films, often adapted from his own novels, and including 22 silent features (of which only three, 1920's *Within Our Gates* and *The Symbol of the Unconquered: A Story of the Ku*

*Spencer Williams's astonishing 'The Blood of Jesus' is steeped in an unmistakably African-American spiritual vernacular*



The poster for *The Bronze Buckaroo* (1939)



Cathryn Caviness in *The Blood of Jesus* (1941)

*Klux Klan*, and 1925's *Body and Soul*, starring Paul Robeson, now survive. All are included here).

Micheaux was criticised by some of his black contemporaries – notably some associated with the Harlem Renaissance – for neglecting themes of racial uplift in favour of crime and comedy, but the three silents here all demonstrate his serious, melodramatic side. Both the 1920 films are fascinating in part for being responses to D.W. Griffith's notoriously racist *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). Where being mixed race signifies villainy and immorality in Griffith's film, the heroine played by Sylvia Landry in *Within Our Gates* is courageous; and where *Birth* depicted the Klan as valiant knights, in *The Symbol of the Unconquered* they are a ragtag of thieves and crooks. A sequence showing hooded klansmen on horseback, flaming torches in hand, is disturbingly menacing.

But Micheaux's films offer more than mere historical interest. Musser argues that he should be regarded as a radical formalist, citing, for example, Micheaux's use of flashbacks within flashbacks in *Within Our Gates*, and also the way such later sound films as *Murder in Harlem* (1935), *Birthingright* (1938) and *The Girl from Chicago* (1932) – remakes of his earlier silent films – often deployed narratively inexplicable but fascinating disjunctures. In *Birthingright*, for instance, an all-white cabaret audience in one cut suddenly shifts to become composed entirely of black faces.

Micheaux aside, the other especially notable figure here is Spencer Williams, who as an actor found mainstream fame in the *Amos 'n' Andy* TV show in the 1950s, but during the race movie era made a number of highly distinctive films with the white Texas-based distributor Al Sack. The most remarkable of these was *The Blood of Jesus* (1941), a story of a dying woman (Cathryn Caviness) whose faith is tested in a vividly imagined purgatory in which the sinful temptations of blues music and juke joints are pushed her way by a gleefully dancing Satan. This astonishing film feels steeped in an unmistakably African-American vernacular and a deeply felt Baptist spirituality.

Religion also figures strongly elsewhere, as in the often surreal films made by travelling evangelists James and Eloyce Gist, like *Hell-Bound Train* (1930), which would be screened with an accompanying sermon in churches and meeting halls; or in the amateur footage shot by Reverend Solomon Sir Jones, Baptist minister in Oklahoma, which he would have shown to congregations in black churches as he travelled across the state.

The whole set is presented immaculately, with useful contextualising extras. The music accompanying the silent films is also uniformly excellent, particularly the score to *Within Our Gates* from Paul D. Miller, aka DJ Spooky, and an especially effective, drums-only score (recorded in 1998) by the late, great Max Roach to *The Symbol of the Unconquered*.

Following the success of the *Pioneers of African-American Cinema* set, Kino Lorber has recently launched a crowdfunding initiative for what it hopes will be its next project, a collection of films by early female filmmakers. Their efforts deserve every support. **B**



# New releases

## BURROUGHS: THE MOVIE

Howard Brookner; USA 1983; Criterion/Region B Blu-ray; 90 minutes; 1.37:1; Features: audio commentary by Jim Jarmusch, 1985 audio interview with Howard Brookner, video interview with Aaron Brookner, outtakes, New York Film Festival panel (2014), alternative edit of film's rushes by Robert E. Fulton III (1981), insert with essay by Luc Sante

### Reviewed by Tony Rayns

*Burroughs: The Movie*, completed in 1983 after some five years of work but not much seen until it was 're-premiered' at the 2014 New York Film Festival, turns out to be a very happy discovery for fans of William Burroughs and his writing. The droll public readings that Burroughs gave in later life didn't fully counter his image as an austere and rather unapproachable figure, but Howard Brookner finesses a surprisingly warm and intimate portrait. By taking Burroughs back to places where he grew up and lived, and reuniting him with lovers, friends and colleagues from the 1940s and 1950s, he actually gets the writer to relax and open up about the autobiographical origins of his verbal 'routines' and fantasies. With help from interviewees (notably Allen Ginsberg), Brookner also manages to throw new light on murky episodes in Burroughs's history, including the death of his wife Joan in Mexico (the consensus is misadventure) and his relationships with Kerouac and the Beats in the 1950s. The biggest surprises are the familial scenes: Burroughs reminiscing with his brother Mortimer, and later showing fatherly concern for his doomed son William Jr. James Grauerholz (Burroughs's amanuensis and heir) is the most lucid interviewee, not least when he explains how he became the writer's surrogate son.

The film is essentially a collage of fairly disparate materials, and it relies rather more than the end-credits acknowledge on the late 50s/early 60s black-and-white footage that Antony Balch shot with Burroughs and Brion Gysin in Paris, London and New York, to represent the most creative phase in Burroughs's career and to suggest how Burroughs's fantasies might best be acted out. (Brookner's attempt at a 'Doctor Benway' skit, with Burroughs and Jackie Curtis performing blood-soaked 'surgery' in the bathroom of the 'Bunker', looks clunky beside Balch's brilliant vignettes.)

Still, the film is briskly edited and intelligently organised, and it assuredly provides a more vivid account of Burroughs's life and art than any other available.

**Disc:** The clean transfer buffs up even old video and TV footage and is very watchable throughout. The best of the extras is a very smart 23-minute 'alternative cut' of the film by Robert E. Fulton III; the weakest is a stilted panel discussion from the New York Film Festival. Jim Jarmusch's commentary track is not scene-specific and consists mainly of rather ponderous anecdotes and ruminations on what Burroughs meant to his generation.

## CAT PEOPLE

Jacques Tourneur; USA 1942; Criterion/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; 73 minutes; 1.37:1; Features: 2005 audio commentary with excerpts from interview with Simone Simon, 'Val Lewton: The Man in the Shadows', 1979 interview

with Jacques Tourneur, interview with cinematographer John Bailey, essay by critic Geoffrey O'Brien, trailer

### Reviewed by Virginie Sélyav

Producer Val Lewton's first low-budget horror picture for RKO, made in 1942, is a haunting classic, a film that conjures up the shadows of the soul rather than monsters that can be seen.

French actress Simone Simon is seductively foreign and different as Irena, the Serbian émigré who falls in love with the squarely decent Oliver (Kent Smith) but won't consummate the marriage because of a superstitious fear that she will turn into a wild creature. At the heart of the story is the dark side of sexual desire, but not the kind that can be neatly elucidated and resolved by psychoanalysis, as represented by the misguidedly overconfident Dr Judd, and this is what makes the film so lastingly resonant: it delves into the deepest, strangest, primal part of human pathology, the part that lies hidden under social facades. Carrying inside her the ghosts and evil spirits of old Europe, Irena punctures the bland, wholesome surface of modern America, and for a moment the untamed beast roams free on its tarmac streets.

Director Jacques Tourneur modulates the fluctuating frontiers between light and dark, night and day, to reflect the wavering lines between human and inhuman, rational and irrational, love and lust. It's territory that Tourneur and Lewton would continue to explore in the following year's *I Walked with a Zombie* and *The Leopard Man*. Together, they recast American horror as a magic-lantern show projecting desire's obscure shapes on the hazy landscape of the soul. **Disc:** The Criterion transfer is superb, with radiant whites and lustrous blacks that bring out the rich depth of the cinematography. Extras include a commentary by historian Gregory Mank, a feature-length Lewton documentary, a 1979 interview with Tourneur, and an interview with John Bailey (cinematographer on Paul Schrader's 1982 remake of the film).

## THE CHASE

Arthur Penn; USA 1966; Twilight Time/Region A/V1 Blu-ray/DVD; 134 minutes; 2.35:1; Features: isolated score track, audio commentary with film historians Lenn Dobbs, Julie Kirgo and Nick Redman, original theatrical trailer

### Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Arthur Penn's *The Chase*, released a year and a half before the watershed of his *Bonnie and Clyde*, is awkwardly poised between Old and New



Paws for thought: *Cat People*

Hollywoods, a film that palpably squirms with the itch to shuck off the last bits of decorum.

This nervous energy happens to suit the movie's subject matter—it's a floating all-night party in Tarl, a coastal Texas town simultaneously hit by the birthday of leading citizen Val Rogers (E.G. Marshall), a visiting dentists' convention and the rumoured impending arrival of Bubber Reeves (Robert Redford), a native son who is headed home after busting out of jail. In the middle of all this is Sheriff Calder (Marlon Brando), continually rebuffing reproaches that he is in Rogers's pocket, and trying to find Bubber before he's strung up by a very modern lynch mob of Caddy-driving mid-century swingers.

"Folks don't seem to think much of married couples changing partners these days," observes an old-fashioned town elder outside one of the film's many boozy blow-outs, and *The Chase* is full of such confrontations between the traditional and the up-to-date. The screenplay comes from a play and novel by Texan Horton Foote, who never hit a false note when it came to small-town social dynamics, with an adaptation credited to 30s radical relic Lillian Hellman. (Producer Sam Spiegel intervened significantly, and Penn was never satisfied with the final result.)

The film combines stacy studio shoots with location work in a fashion that recalls the roughly contemporaneous *Coogan's Bluff*, while performances are all over the map. Robert Duvall's cuckolded bank VP seems like he's been in this town his entire life; Jane Fonda, playing Bubber's unfaithful wife, like she's just blown in from Dallas airport; and Miriam Hopkins, playing Bubber's mother, is all twangy grotesquerie. As for Brando, he is Brando, the transitional figure par excellence, here absorbing a beating that pushes the limits of what was then permissible for screen violence, recalling the raw physicality of the Penn/Spiegel production *The Miracle Worker* (1962). Shooting sprawling parties and white riots in widescreen, Penn has a genius for blocking bodies en masse, and the concluding junkyard bonfire feels like a lucid prophecy of the late 60s, and the fire next time.

**Disc:** A strong visual presentation, with especial attention given to John Barry's score, and a commentary on the film's troubled gestation.

## DOC

Frank Perry; USA 1971; Signal One/Region B Blu-ray; 96 minutes; Certificate 15; 1.85:1; Features: new interviews with Stacy Keach and editor Alan Heim, 1980 audio interview with Faye Dunaway, commentary by C. Courtney Joyner, trailer, stills gallery

### Reviewed by Kim Newman

Considering the various film versions of the Gunfight at the OK Corral as the episodes of *Rashomon*, Frank Perry's 1971 take is the one from the viewpoint of the cynical drunken tramp. In contrast to the clear-eyed, righteous Wyatt Earps of Henry Fonda (*My Darling Clementine*), Burt Lancaster (*Gunfight at the OK Corral*) and Hugh O'Brian (*The Life and Legend of Wyatt Earp*), Harris Yulin's marshal is a venal, creepy politician driven by rage, ambition and an inferiority complex. He cold-cocks cowboys with his extra-long barrel and tries to catch a stagecoach robber only as part of an election campaign. Finally,



## OF MEN AND MONSTERS

Kobayashi Masaki's epic exploration of the moral complexities of conflict is powered by his own experiences of war

### THE HUMAN CONDITION

Kobayashi Masaki; Japan 1959-61; Arrow Films/  
Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; 574  
minutes; 2.35:1; Features: introduction and selected  
scene commentary by Philip Kemp, booklet, trailers

#### Reviewed by Philip Concannon

Kobayashi Masaki's filmmaking career was almost over before it had even begun. In 1942, eight months into his apprenticeship at Shochiku studios, Kobayashi was drafted into the Japanese army and despatched to Manchuria. As an educated man, he was viewed as potential officer material and was urged to take the requisite exams, but Kobayashi had moral objections to the war and refused any advancement beyond the rank of private. As his friend and colleague Shinoda Masahiro said, "He was resolved to share the burden of the war as a common citizen." Kobayashi's time in the military ended in a prisoner of war camp on Okinawa, before he finally returned to Shochiku in 1946.

When Kobayashi did resume his career at the studio, he was determined to revisit his wartime experiences through his filmmaking, but that was no easy task in a devastated country still licking its wounds and reconstructing its post-war identity. His first attempt to reckon with Japan's role in the conflict was *The Thick-Walled Room*, which drew from the diaries of Japanese soldiers tried for crimes against humanity. That film was made in 1953 but its release was held up for three years, lest it should disturb the sensitive relationship between Japan and the US, so Shochiku was understandably anxious when in 1958 Kobayashi suggested an adaptation of Gomikawa Junpei's novel *The Human Condition*. The studio passed on the opportunity, forcing Kobayashi to mount this epic production independently with Ninjin Club (though Shochiku would ultimately distribute).

It's easy to see why Shochiku was cautious about this project – aside from political concerns, what Kobayashi was proposing was three huge films, made and released over the course of three years. But it's just as easy to see why Kobayashi felt so compelled to make it. Gomikawa's wartime experiences had been very similar to his own, and the protagonist Kaji (played in the film by the astounding Nakadai Tatsuya) seems to stand as an amalgamation of their memories and perspectives.

Kaji is a pacifist and socialist whose staunch principles and humanist worldview are challenged by the brutality of military life and by the horror that he is exposed to over the course of *The Human Condition*'s 567 minutes. While the length of the film may seem intimidating, it is fully justified by the way in which Kaji's character evolves throughout.




Battle scarred: Aratama Michiyo as Michiko, Nakadai Tatsuya as Kaji in *The Human Condition*

One of the criticisms levelled at Kobayashi's film at the time of its release was that Kaji was somehow too idealistic, too good, too naive to be plausible, but this starting-point for him is essential for us to see how his black-and-white morality is gradually muddled into shades of grey. The man who cannot bring himself to administer a slap across the face as punishment early in the trilogy later beats a man to death and buries him in a latrine, yet we can draw a straight line between these two figures because we have witnessed every abuse and moral compromise that has chipped away at his soul over the course of his journey. "What is a man? Not poetry and morality. He's a mass of lust and greed that absorbs and excretes," a supervisor in the Manchurian labour camp tells Kaji, and in such an environment his attempts to adhere to a higher set of ideals feel futile. By the end of the second film in the trilogy, we can sense his grasp on his humanity slipping and being replaced by a more primal urge. "I'm a monster," he cries, "but I'm going to stay alive!"

That moment occurs after a visceral 20-minute battle scene in which Kaji and his fellow soldiers are outgunned and overrun by Soviet tanks; this battle scene, you might be surprised to learn, is the only depiction of actual warfare in the film's

*We can sense the protagonist's grasp on his humanity slipping and being replaced by a more primal urge*

near-ten-hour running time. Kobayashi is more concerned with the struggle of the individual against society, and the way ordinary people live under a system of authoritarianism and nationalism. The atrocities in the film represent multiple levels of moral degradation, from casual acts of cruelty to outright barbarism, with Kaji both bearing witness and being complicit. It might sound like an ordeal, but there is great poetry and beauty in *The Human Condition* too, with Kobayashi's direction growing more dynamic and expressive in each instalment; the way he uses the harsh Manchurian landscape (actually his home island of Hokkaido) is particularly potent. As a beaten but still hopeful Kaji doggedly marches through the vast expanses of snow in the moving final scenes, few men have ever seemed so utterly alone.

The transfers for Arrow's release were taken from new prints struck from the original negatives, and the crisp images do justice to Miyajima Yoshio's rich black-and-white cinematography. Perhaps understandably, given the size of the main feature, Arrow has opted for quality over quantity in the extras. Philip Kemp's introduction and scene-specific commentaries provide historical context and a close study of the film's themes, while the booklet contains a 1993 interview with Kobayashi and an excellent essay by Shimazu Naoko on post-war Japanese culture. It's an illuminating and handsomely produced package for a film that deserves to stand alongside that other great monument to the human cost of war, Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*. 



# New releases

the Earps turn up for the famous gunfight with shotguns, then mow down the Clantons while barely in range of their pistols.

The focus of the film is Doc Holliday (Stacy Keach), a maniacal consumptive fearless in fights because he knows he's already dying. He enters into a relationship with grubby whore Kate Elder (Faye Dunaway) which mixes now-uncomfortable abuse comedy, petty domesticity and snarly S&M, but the call of senseless violence drags him into fights where he is always killing himself as much as his enemies.

One of a blip of 'revisionist' westerns from the early 1970s – of a piece with the takes on Billy the Kid, General Custer and Jesse James in *Dirty Little Billy*, *Little Big Man* and *The Great Northfield Minnesota Raid* – this is infused with Nixon/Vietnam-era cynicism about America's mythology. As such, it sometimes goes out of its way to be unlikeable in a manner that rings as false as Fordian glorification, though Perry and Keach make Doc an interesting, unsettling presence. In an interview, Keach reveals that the original cut of the film was more hallucinatory, with a ghostly Doc narrating his life story – suggesting that an attempt was made to wrestle this into a more conventional form in post-production. The harsh desert – made all the harsher by an annoyed Mexican bartender who gives Doc and Kate a canteen of vinegar before they ride into it – and the chaotic, bustling, tawdry Tombstone are both vividly realised locales.

**Disc:** As an epitome of the 'mud and rags' school of realist westerns, this sometimes looks even rougher in high-definition – Keach and Yulin's performances gain strength from detail, though Dunaway's makeup dirt and the black teeth of Ike Clanton (Mike Witney) now look theatrically bogus. An array of extras includes interesting talks with Keach and editor Alan Heim, as well as a valuable, wide-ranging commentary from B-picture veteran C. Courtney Joyner covering the film and the history.

## DREAMS

Kurosawa Akira; Japan/US 1990; Criterion UK/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD (separate releases); Certificate PG; 120 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: critical commentary (Stephen Prince), documentaries ('The Making of Dreams', 'Kurosawa's Way'), interviews (Koizumi Takashi, Nogami Teruyo), trailer, booklet

### Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Blu-ray may be the ideal medium for Kurosawa's indulgent dream-portmanteau, reproducing the film's considerable visual beauty far more effectively than VHS or DVD while allowing instant access to the more convincing dreams in a way that's not possible with 35mm screenings. The apocalyptic tone of later episodes also feels more pessimistically convincing in 2016 than it did in 1990, with 'Mount Fuji in Red' taking on far greater resonance in the wake of the still unresolved 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster – the recurring shots of turbulent waves, originally denoting an impassable barrier, now suggest an impending tsunami.

The film remains something of a grab-bag, with reflections on history ('The Tunnel'), art ('Crows') and the limits of endurance ('The Blizzard') rubbing shoulders with Japanese



Innervisions: Kurosawa's *Dreams*

folk legend ('Sunshine Through the Rain', 'The Peach Orchard') and either dystopian or utopian visions of Japan ('The Weeping Demon', 'The Village of the Water Mills'). There are strong echoes of earlier Kurosawa films – the nuclear paranoia of *I Live in Fear* (1955), the man-versus-nature odyssey of *Dersu Uzala* (1975) – as well as bizarre excursions into outright fantasy, most vividly when an unnamed Japanese traveller stumbles into Vincent Van Gogh's paintings after a brusque encounter with the artist himself. Famously, he's played by a ginger-bearded Martin Scorsese speaking New York-accented English instead of Dutch-accented French – but then again, this is a dream.

**Disc:** Identical to the US edition in every respect bar its region code, this disc showcases a superb cinematographer-approved visual presentation, and the sound is unexpectedly enveloping for a mere stereo mix (especially in 'The Blizzard'). There's no faulting the extras too, with the 'making-of' running two-and-a-half hours and much else besides – including a booklet featuring the script for an unrealised ninth dream.

## THE EXECUTIONER

Luis García Berlanga; Spain 1963; Criterion/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; 92 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: interview with Pedro Almodóvar, two Spanish TV programmes about Berlanga and the film, trailer, essay by David Cairns

### Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

Heretofore little known outside Spain, or at least among cineastes who weren't around to frequent the world's major film festivals in the 1950s and 60s, where he was routinely feted, Spanish satirist Luis García Berlanga finally gets his English-speaking home-video due, first with the release of this hallowed Spanish-cinema classic, and next year with a Criterion box-set of four other titles.

*The Executioner* is a lovely, darkly hilarious Iberian entry in one of the era's signature European subgenres: the totalitarian black farce of upwardly social mobility, where life and family fall into the fascist crosshairs thanks to the hapless protagonist's ambitions. It was certainly more common in Iron Curtain countries – think of Andrzej Munk's *Bad Luck* (1960), Juraj Herz's *The Cremator* (1969), Jaromil Jires's *The Joke* (1969) and several episodes in *Pearls of the Deep* (1965) – but here Berlanga brought it, stunningly, to Franco-land, and somehow avoided state censorship along the way.



Gallows humour: *The Executioner*

A deft anti-capital-punishment tumble of dominoes, the story follows Nino Manfredi's restless state undertaker (mostly he delivers bodies to and from funerals) as he faces growing older alone – his profession is romantically off-putting – until he falls in with an elderly government executioner (José Isbert) who's facing retirement. The old coot's grown daughter (Emma Penella), also alone due to her father's career, is more than available, and after a speedy pregnancy and shotgun marriage, the mini-family can vie for new state housing only if our reluctant hero replaces his father-in-law at his post.

Manfredi's irritable schmuck is constitutionally unable to even think about performing his new job (the death-row postponements and delays send him in and out of seizure-inducing anxiety), and well he might be: the method in Spain at the time was the garrote, which entailed manually strangling the prisoner by turning a crank as he's bound to a wooden chair.

Berlanga never gets graphic – it would've given the authorities a convenient censorship out – but the stakes are full-frontal, and certain images, such as the vast white courtyard space in which guards have to drag-escort both the convicted man and his wilting executioner to their final moments together, bind in the memory. Berlanga's style – he loved detailed compositions bustling with four or more characters talking over each other, keying into modern Spain's frustration and claustrophobia – sometimes requires attention and re-viewing, but the payoff is rich and resonant.

Yet another fascinating New Wave-era resurrection that rewrites what we thought we knew about post-war European cinema.

**Disc:** A typically definitive Criterion package, with homegrown contextals that, while occasionally cloying (Juan Carlos Ortega's TV show *La mitad invisible* is too cute by half), clearly frame Berlanga as a national institution.

## JAMAICA INN

Alfred Hitchcock; UK 1939; Arrow Academy/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; 100 minutes; 1.37:1; Features: commentary, trailer, video essay, booklet

### Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

Roundly condemned as the weakest film in Hitchcock's output, *Jamaica Inn* (1939) has nevertheless been the beneficiary of a 4k digital restoration and is now released on Blu-ray

and DVD. The flaws in this studio-bound and rather suspense-free film are explained by the fact that Hitchcock was working with one hand tied behind his back, thanks to producer Charles Laughton, who also stars as Pengallan, the deranged aristo running a vicious wrecking crew in 19th-century Cornwall. Laughton struts around the Elstree soundstage wearing a rubber nose and errant eyebrows, speaking with a mouthful of plums. It's a ludicrous performance, culled from repeated takes, which overbalances the whole film towards macabre comedy but just about works. Less successful is Robert Newton's wan police officer, though Leslie Banks's smuggler Joss is an enjoyably gruesome villain.

Co-producer Erich Pommer, Hitchcock's old nemesis, doubtless had his eye on the other arm, and the stilted screenplay for this Daphne du Maurier adaptation had many parents, including playwright J.B. Priestley, who was drafted in to improve the dialogue. In the end, the novelist disliked the film, but thankfully did not prevent Hitchcock getting his hands on two more of her stories. Hitch wasn't keen either, failing to grace this oddity with a cameo, then scarpering to Hollywood to do du Maurier greater justice with *Rebecca*.

The strengths of *Jamaica Inn* shine in this restoration, though: a superb opening shipwreck sequence, galvanised by rapid montage; a spirited early screen appearance from Maureen O'Hara; able support from several members of the unofficial Hitchcock repertory troupe, including sublime comic relief from Basil Radford; and an unforgettable plunging shot in the finish.

**Disc:** Care has been lavished on this release of a film that deserves a second look if not

complete reappraisal. The transfer is exemplary. Extras include a featurette by Donald Spoto; a chatty commentary by Jeremy Arnold; the trailer; and, in the first pressing, new writing on the film by Nathalie Morris.

## KES

Kenneth Loach; UK 1969; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate PG; 111 minutes; 1.66:1; Features: interviews (David Bradley, Tony Garnett, Richard Hines, Chris Menges, Bernard Atha, Penny Eyles, John Cameron), archive interviews (Ken Loach, 2006 'Kes' reunion), trailer, booklet

### Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Nearly half a century after the start of production, Ken(neth) Loach's second feature still packs a hefty punch, largely because many of its concerns have hardly changed at all. True, the film assumes that school will inevitably be followed by employment (office drone for the brighter kids, down t'pit for the rest), but Loach's vision of Britain as a land of box-ticking disciplinarians with no time for individual expression was established decades before *I, Daniel Blake*.

The casual cruelty that 14-year-old Billy Casper encounters both at home and school, with his tormentors as likely to be staff members as fellow pupils, is exactly analogous to the red-in-beak-and-claw existence of the kestrel that he finds and tames, in the process discovering both a genuine skill and a purpose in life that has so far eluded him. David Bradley's rigorously unsentimental performance remains one of the film's many miracles, as does Chris Menges's cinematography. The resounding echo of the deceptively offhand tone of the greatest Czechoslovak New Wave films is no coincidence: Loach was an avowed fan of *A Blonde in Love* and

*Closely Observed Trains* while Menges had assisted the former film's cinematographer Miroslav Ondricek mere weeks before starting on *Kes*.

**Disc:** Featuring the same Loach and Menges-approved restoration that was included in the Criterion edition, Eureka has assembled an impressive contextual package of four hours of mostly new cast and crew interviews, including some delightful location-scouting from a still highly recognisable Bradley, who observes that the film's fish and chip shop is now known as "Casper's". For completism's sake, the disc also includes the controversial partially redubbed soundtrack, although the best option for those who struggle with the uncompromising Barnsley dialect is to watch the original with hard-of-hearing subtitles.

## NAPOLEON

Abel Gance; France 1927; BFI/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; 332 minutes; 1.33:1/4:1 (triptych); Features: commentary, video features, triptych panels, booklet

### Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

First things first. No, you don't need three televisions to watch *Napoleon* (1927) at home. It might help, but we'll come to that later. Abel Gance's epic, a cinematic monument to Bonaparte and a landmark in film history, has a long and painful exhibition history. For decades it was impossible to see, but then, following Kevin Brownlow's arduous restoration, audiences could take in the five-and-a-half-hour print at rare screenings backed with a full orchestra. Now that it is available on DVD and Blu-ray, the mystique may have faded, but therefore the function of this release, more than with other releases of classic films, is to present *Napoleon* as an object of study, and appreciation. By taking *Napoleon* home, we hope to understand this ferociously innovative film a little better.

The digital restoration, on top of Brownlow's piece-by-piece reconstruction, gives the film's texture fresh vibrancy. Sharper detail boosts scenes defined by rapid camera movement or split-screen techniques, and the film's tints seem far punchier than before, particularly a deep, bloody scarlet. Carl Davis's brilliant orchestral score fares very well in the transfer to digital: it has been newly recorded and is available in a 5.1 mix for those who have the sound system to do it justice.

**Disc:** The facility to pause and rewind the film may seem as much a boon to silent-movie aficionados as any of the extras, which are provided in generous quantities. A tirelessly informative commentary by film historian Paul Cuff guides viewers through every aspect of the film's background and production. There is a 45-minute video interview with composer Davis that goes into fine detail about the score, and a short featurette explaining the digital restoration procedure. The most precious video extra is Brownlow's 1967 documentary *The Charm of Dynamite*, narrated by Lindsay Anderson, which includes behind-the-scenes film from the making of *Napoleon* and charming interview footage of Gance himself. There is a diverting gallery of stills and archive material, and also a substantial booklet with extensive writing on the film by Brownlow, Cuff and Hervé Dumont, plus a



**Jamaica Inn** Charles Laughton struts around wearing a rubber nose and errant eyebrows. It's a ludicrous performance but it just about works



# Television

## ALEC CLIFTON-TAYLOR'S SIX ENGLISH TOWNS

SIX ENGLISH TOWNS/SIX MORE ENGLISH TOWNS

UK 1978/81; BBC/Simply Media/Region

2 DVD; 180 minutes each; 4:3

**Reviewed by Robert Hanks**

What I'd really like to see on disc are some of Ian Nairn's fluently acerbic architectural travelogues, but Alec Clifton-Taylor's far more genial and conventional efforts will do as a stopgap. In each programme, Clifton-Taylor visits a smallish English town that hasn't been interfered with too harshly by the 20th century, discusses its general architectural character, congratulates the buildings on details that please him – the parquetry, the excellence of the chamfered brickwork – and sighs over the foolishness of planners and builders. Likes: local materials, harmonious rooflines and the Civic Amenities Act of 1967. Dislikes: concrete slabs and high-rise buildings. Though AC-T is conservative, he has a radical streak – he's quite dismissive of stately homes, far more interested in ordinary people and the way their lives fit into urban spaces.

Clifton-Taylor didn't appear on TV until he was in his late sixties (and was past 70 when he made *Six English Towns*), but he has a natural, almost coquettish relationship with the camera. Though camerawork and editing are stately by modern standards, AC-T's commentary is brisk, judgements fired off with the minimum of explanation or qualification; there is a touch of steel beneath the charm. *Six English Towns* covers Chichester, Richmond, Tewkesbury, Stamford, Totnes and Ludlow; *Six More English Towns* does Warwick, Berwick-upon-Tweed, Saffron Walden, Lewes, Bradford on Avon and Beverley. *Another Six English Towns* (1984) is due out next year.

**Disc:** The film is quite faded, sound occasionally a bit wobbly, but nothing to worry about.

## FRANCIS DURBRIDGE PRESENTS... BAT OUT OF HELL

Alan Bromly; UK 1966; BBC/Danann/

Region 2 DVD; Certificate PG; 150 minutes; 4:3

**Reviewed by Robert Hanks**

A terrifically ropy, pleasing five-part thriller serial from the Durbridge stable: Sylvia Syms and a youthful John Thaw are lovers who murder her husband, only to start getting phone calls from the dead man. The plot doesn't thicken so much as clot – more murders, blackmail, motive after motive, murder again, secret lovers... Essential characters exist only off screen, which is cheating, and Durbridge's dialogue is full of people telling each other "I see what you mean," as if to provide cover for the vast psychological and practical implausibilities he is pulling. The action scenes are inept, but there are moments – a policeman strokes a cat, and his hand comes away covered in blood – of genuine near-creepiness.

**Disc:** Ancient black-and-white stock in good nick; it's frustrating to have to return to the menu after each episode.

## Q VOL 1

UK 1969/75/78; BBC/Simply Media/Region

2 DVD; Certificate 15; 480 minutes; 4:3

**Reviewed by Robert Hanks**

Spike Milligan is best remembered, and best



**Q Vol. 1** If you wanted to construct a case for Spike Milligan as genius, Exhibit A would be his television work, and above all the early Q programmes.

loved, for his radio work in the 50s; but if I wanted to construct a case for Milligan as genius, Exhibit A would be his television work, and above all the early Q programmes. Though written in collaboration with Neil Shand, they feel – far more than *The Goon Show* or any of his very spotty film work – like an untrammelled expression of Milligan's tortured, not always pleasant but wildly original personality: here he was freed from format and from the effort of writing gags to cater to star performers, and apparently subject to only the lightest supervisory touch from the BBC (bizarrely, given his previously antagonistic relationship with management during the Goon years).

The programmes are a loose collection of sketches, sight gags and puns, games with words and space (a man is trapped inside an elephant, another has World War II in a suitcase and World War I in his portmanteau), impervious to analysis. Sometimes the mix is unfunny, sometimes hysterical; sometimes the sheer oddity is breathtaking. Comparisons to dada are two a penny, but Milligan could have taught Tristan Tzara a thing or two.


The first series, Q5 (I haven't come across any satisfactory explanation for the nomenclature), is particularly startling, as Milligan frolics with the possibilities of the medium. He plays games with editing straight out of Georges Méliès, as though moving pictures have only just been invented: a concert pianist keeps vanishing from his own piano stool, and then his grand piano turns into a wash basin. But Milligan also pokes fun at television's already hardening mannerisms,

with newsreaders (often played by Lord Gnome himself, Richard Ingrams) solemnly intoning absurdities, vox pops with admirably deadpan members of the public, interviewers piously refusing to notice their interviewees' stupidities, fake commercials. Monty Python's debt to these programmes is well known (and frankly acknowledged), but Python never attained Milligan's zen-like indifference to punchlines, the purity of his non sequiturs, what feels like his rage against reason and convention.

That undertone of anger is one of the things that makes the remaining episodes of Q5 uncomfortable to watch; another is Milligan's conviction that there's something inherently amusing in Jews, Pakistanis and persons of restricted growth. The same attitudes are present in the other two series here, Q6 (1975) and Q7 (1978), but it all goes down more smoothly. In Q5 the cast, improbably large by today's standards, seems to be padded out by mates dragged along for a giggle, alongside regular collaborators such as John Bluthal. 6 and 7 get a useful dose of professionalism from, among others, Peter Jones. They also get musical interludes, which might interrupt the flow if there was one: as it is, they're more intriguing than intrusive. Milligan himself seems a smidge mellower, too: hobnobbing with the Prince of Wales will do that for you.

**Disc:** Only three episodes of Q5, the first series, survive, and two of those are in black-and-white: they're a historical document rather than a hi-def viewing experience. The other two are standard BBC videotaped comedies of the late 70s – they're never going to look beautiful, but they're fine. **S**

# New releases

 text interview with Davis. A facsimile of the film's original publicity brochure features prettily coloured images from the film and Gance's invigorating 'proclamation' to his cast and crew, which includes such portentous instructions as: "My whole life will amount to nothing unless you all devote every second to this project."

By far the biggest novelty of this three-disc set is the ability to watch the film's famous widescreen triptych, not just letterboxed on one screen but as in the live projection, on three screens at once. The left, centre and right panels of the Polyvision sequence are included as extras on each disc. So if you have three screens and three disc players, correctly aligned, you can experience the full-width finale at home – and no doubt also the nerves of any projectionist who has ever been tasked with coordinating the reels at those famous 35mm screenings. As Gance said to his team in June 1924: "My friends, all the world's screens are waiting."

## PUNCH-DRUNK LOVE

Paul Thomas Anderson; USA 2002; Criterion/Region A/B Blu-ray/DVD; 95 minutes; 2.39:1; Features: 'Blossoms & Blood' short film, interview with Jon Brion, behind-the-scenes footage of soundtrack recording session, Michael Connor and Lia Gangitano on artist Jeremy Blake plus additional Blake artworks, Cannes Film Festival 2002 press conference, NBC News interview with 'pudding guy' David Phillips, 'Twelve Scoopstones', deleted scenes, 'Mattress Man' commercial, trailers, essay by Miranda July

### Reviewed by Kate Stables

After the big-canvas complexities of *Boogie Nights* (1997) and *Magnolia* (1999), Paul Thomas Anderson sought "something short and sweet, and hopefully simple". Yet beyond its purposefully plain story, in which Adam Sandler's alienated loser Barry stumbles across love in the midst of an emotional meltdown, it's an intriguingly deliberate piece, full of formal experiments. As critic Amos Barshad once observed, it's technically a 'romantic comedy', but in the way that *Guernica* is technically 'a large painting'.

Digging down into the banked anger and frustration of Sandler's trademark man-child screen persona, it creates a mood of exquisite awkwardness. Underlining this is the film's determinedly stylised *mise en scène*, which translates Barry's internal unease into everything from his startlingly blue suit/office wall combo, to the endless identical white corridors losing him in his lover Lena's apartment block like a mouse in a maze. Unexpected visual punctuation is provided by artist Jeremy Blake's melting chromatic abstracts (they create "a psychological space", according to one of the excellent extras). Their sudden outbursts of colour carefully echo the film's startling eruptions: Barry's wall-pounding rages, a brace of slamming car crashes, a squealing flight from violent blackmail.

Composer Jon Brion is fascinating in a lengthy interview about the equally painstaking pre-production integration of his music, whose percussive beats blur the line between soundtrack and sound design. Sandler's anxious, dogged performance radiates a kind of sweetness only hinted at in his earlier career, but Emily Watson's beatifically agreeable Lena feels short-



Chancing it: *To Live and Die in LA*

changed as a lost man's shot at redemption.

**Disc:** A frankly gorgeous transfer, which makes its colours pop like an MGM musical. The extras package is thorough as well as comprehensive, right down to an interview with the real-life inspiration for Barry's determined pursuit of an open-ended air-miles offer. The film's Cannes press interview video, where French film analysis wrestles American entertainment values, provides the light relief.

## ROXANNE

Fred Schepisi; USA 1987; Eureka/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate PG; 107 minutes; 2.35:1; Features: trailer

### Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Along with numerous TV versions, Edmond Rostand's swashbuckling romantic verse-drama *Cyrano de Bergerac* (premiered in 1897) has engendered no lack of feature-film adaptations since Augusto Genina's 1923 silent movie. We've had a Japanese version (Inagaki Hiroshi's *Samurai Saga*, 1959, with Mifune Toshiro in the lead), a Russian version (*Sirano de Berzherak*, 1980, directed by Naum Birman), a 2012 Spanish musical version with Plácido Domingo, and even a gender-switched version (*The Truth About Cats & Dogs*, 1996, with Janeane Garofalo in the Cyrano role). Hollywood tackled it in 1950 with José Ferrer as the big-nosed swordsman, and there have been several well-regarded French adaptations – most notably Jean-Paul Rappeneau's 1990 film starring Gérard Depardieu.

*Roxanne*, despite naming itself for the heroine, is essentially a Steve Martin vehicle. As CD Bales, fire chief in a small northwest ski-resort township (the film was shot in Nelson, British Columbia), he gives a light-footed, dancing performance where the comedy outweighs the tragedy. He's at his best in scenes of verbal and physical dexterity – fencing with two abusive drunks, armed only with a squash racket, or coming up with 20 imaginative ways to insult his own nose. ("Paranoid: keep that guy away from my cocaine!") Unlike Depardieu's nose, whose already generous-sized conk is plausibly amplified, Martin's never seems anything but a comedy appendage.

The rest of the cast live in the nose's shadow, though Shelley Duvall as CD's confidante makes the most of an underwritten role. Daryl Hannah's Roxanne hardly convinces as a dedicated astronomer (least of all when she dons glasses to indicate her intellectual status), and Rick Rossovich as Chris, the hunky-but-

dumb beneficiary of CD's ventriloquising, plays it just a little too dumb. The slapstick Keystone Cops antics of CD's inept fire crew become tedious. This is Martin's film (he also scripted) and he carries it off with style.

**Disc:** The Panavision mountain scenery comes up a treat. Sparse extras.

## TO LIVE AND DIE IN LA

William Friedkin; USA 1985; Arrow Video/Region B Blu-ray; 116 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: audio commentary by William Friedkin, interviews with composer Wang Chung, stunt coordinator Buddy Joe Hooker, stars William Petersen, Dwier Brown and Debra Feuer, 'Counterfeit World: The Making of To Live and Die in LA', deleted scene, alternate ending, stills gallery, theatrical trailer, radio spot

### Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Let's start with the counterfeiting montage in the first reel, a walk-through of the artisanal operation involved in making phoney \$20 plates and printing funny money. This process-oriented material recalls semi-documentary 1940s genre pictures such as Anthony Mann's *T-Men* (1947) or Richard Fleischer's *Trapped* (1949), movies that cast federal institutions rather than individuals as their protagonists. As, in a way, does William Friedkin's *To Live and Die in LA* – though the synthesiser stabs introducing a highly danceable beat by Wang Chung signify that we're in a temple of high 80s style here. This is a movie that could be discussed at length on the basis of its font choices alone. Friedkin, a born competitor, had mostly been coasting since *Cruising* (1980), working below his talent if working at all, and there is a sense that here he is taking dead aim at the rising generation of stylists, the Paul Schraders and Michael Manns, who'd been on the rise during his time off the court. William Petersen, star of Mann's *Manhunter* the following year, is pulpily named Secret Service agent Richard Chance, a Miller Lite-and-adrenaline junkie introduced base jumping from the Vincent Thomas Bridge in the industrial South Bay. DP Robby Müller, here as in *Barfly* (1987), shows a real affinity for a down-at-the-heels Los Angeles, mapping out a city of burger stands, trackside beer joints, oil refineries and a topless bar called Shipwreck Joey's Cabaret, all frequently cast in a smog-tinted orange dusklight that suits the film's sense of universal iniquity. Petersen's restless, cocksure and totally headlong performance – dig that no-sweat vault over a bench at LAX – sets the film's pace, which continues after he makes his exit, while Willem Dafoe is Buddha-calm and gelid as designer-chic foil 'Rick' Masters, one of the era's quintessential yuppie-scum archfiends. (The type is due for a comeback.) The film throws a new neon lighting scheme on old 'cops and crooks are alike' themes, while the against-oncoming-traffic car chase is the stuff of legend, a clear gambit to one-up *The French Connection* (1971), and sure evidence that Friedkin's stiffest competition was himself.

**Disc:** Graciously spared any of the 'improvements' that Friedkin has sometimes been known to visit on his films, Arrow's presentation looks great in motion, which the movie nearly perpetually is. Further accolades are due to the armada of special features, with Friedkin proving again one of our finest raconteur auteurs. 



# Lost and found

## JENNY

OVERLOOKED FILMS CURRENTLY UNAVAILABLE ON UK DVD OR BLU-RAY

Together, Marcel Carné and Jacques Prévert made masterpieces. This flawed but fascinating drama is where their partnership began

By Philip Kemp

One of the all-time great writer/director partnerships, Jacques Prévert and Marcel Carné made seven films together, of which three are reckoned out-and-out masterpieces of world cinema: *Le Quai des brumes* (1938), *Le Jour se lève* (1939) and *Les Enfants du paradis* (1945). Two more of them – the absurdist farce *Drôle de drame* (1937), set in a richly improbable Edwardian London, and the poised medieval allegory *Les Visiteurs du soir* (1942) – have their champions. But the first and last of the sequence have suffered almost total eclipse. *Les Portes de la nuit* (1946), last of the films the two men completed together (the 1947 *La Fleur de l'âge* remained unfinished), is generally considered a débâcle, a belated attempt to revisit a worn-out formula. And their first collaboration, *Jenny* (1936), is rarely if ever mentioned.

Which is surprising. True, the plot flails about, toppling now and then into melodramatic cliché, and altogether the film has trouble hitting the right tone. Even so, the earliest flowering of both men's talents can be intermittently perceived, the meeting of two strangely disparate temperaments. To quote Ivo Jarosy: "Carné never really believed in happiness; Prévert believed in nothing else." For almost a decade, it was their pooled dissimilarities that would prove fertile.

*Jenny* was Carné's first feature as director. It was bequeathed to him by Jacques Feyder, with whom he'd worked as assistant director on *Le Grand Jeu* (1934), *Pension Mimosas* (1935) and *La Kermesse héroïque* (1935). Feyder had planned to direct *Jenny* himself, with his wife Françoise Rosay in the title role, but instead accepted Alexander Korda's invitation to make *Knight Without Armour* (1937) at Denham, and passed the project over to Carné. Prévert, six years older than Carné, was the more experienced of the two, having scripted nine features and four shorts – most notably Renoir's *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange* (1936). Already making his name as a poet, he had been a member of the Surrealist group – until he was expelled by André Breton, allegedly for 'irreverence'. On *Jenny*, he co-scripted with Jacques Constant, who would later work on *Pépé le Moko* (1937).

The plot of *Jenny* owes something to Bernard Shaw's early play *Mrs Warren's Profession*: a well-brought-up young woman learns the truth about her mother's less than respectable source of income. We kick off in a make-believe studio London, clearly anticipating *Drôle de drame*, where young concert pianist Danielle (Lisette Lanvin) is breaking up with her English boyfriend and planning to return to Paris. As she brushes him off, a street singer intones a sentimental ballad; a neat transition takes us to Paris, where



Call girl: Françoise Rosay in *Jenny*

*The earliest flowering of both men's talents can be perceived, the meeting of two strangely disparate temperaments*

a young boy is singing the exact same song in French. He's accompanied by an accordionist played by no less than Joseph Kosma, who also furnishes the film's score. (It was his first score credit – and sole onscreen appearance.)

In Paris, Danielle enters a world of duplicity and lurking menace. The smart restaurant her mother Jenny claims to be running is a high-class brothel, situated in the nouveau riche 16th *arrondissement* and advertised as "The Liveliest Place in Paris", where elderly roués slobber over pretty young girls. Jenny herself is in thrall to a younger man,

her toyboy Lucien (Albert Préjean), whom she provides with a plush apartment and a flash car. The money she lavishes on him has run the bordello into debt, angering her criminal backer Monsieur Benoît (Charles Vanel at his most saturnine). Benoît gets some of Prévert's most expressive lines – referring to Lucien, he remarks contemptuously, making a squashing gesture with his hands, "He's a *petit-suisse* [an ultra-soft Normandy cheese] who we can flatten like *that*."

Benoît's sidekick is the film's most grotesque character: a hunchback known as Dromadaire, played by Jean-Louis Barrault with a twisted grin of sheer malignancy. Lucien, he comments gloatingly, is "far too good-looking", and would be much improved by losing an eye. Nearly as repellantly outlandish is the predatory L'Albinos (Robert Le Vigan), one of Jenny's clients, who comes on to any girl he fancies by brandishing his fat wallet. When Danielle visits her mother's 'restaurant' and realises what kind of establishment it is, it's L'Albinos, eyes glittering with lust, who moves in on her. She's rescued from his clutches by Lucien and inevitably the two fall for each other, not realising their mutual connection via Jenny.

Carné shoots this purulent *demi-monde* in smoky, moody tones, taking in some scenes of urban industrial waterfronts, which in their wistfully romanticised *grisaille* look forward to *Le Quai des brumes*, *Le Jour se lève* and the non-Prévert *Hotel du nord* (1938). *Jenny* never feels wholly formed in dramatic terms, and suffers from dropping several of its more interesting characters – L'Albinos, and Sylvia Bataille's chanteuse Florence – rather too soon. Even so, the seeds of Prévert/Carné poetic realism are visibly starting to germinate. Not that Carné ever liked the term; he preferred 'fantastique social'. Which, indeed, would fit *Jenny* rather better. ☺

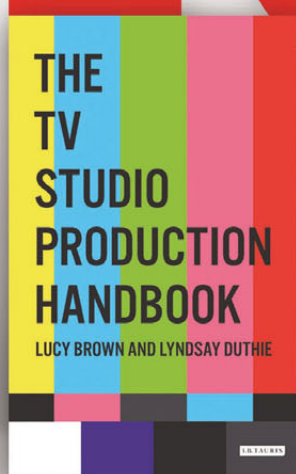
### WHAT THE PAPERS SAID



**'Jenny was an important step for Carné, for it delineated his recurrent pictorial style and established the creative partnerships he would return to for the next decade. The casting of major star, Françoise Rosay, reveals the typical Carné product: star-studded and technically proficient. Stylistically, the mixture of theatrical, melodramatic and realist styles throughout the film is striking.'**

**Ben McCann** 'Senses of Cinema', 2011

# Read



## THE TV STUDIO PRODUCTION HANDBOOK

By Lucy Brown & Lyndsay Duthie, I.B. Tauris, 240pp, paperback, £16.99, ISBN 9781784536282

Here is the one-stop handbook to make your studio production shine. *The TV Studio Production Handbook* explains the production process from beginning to end, covering everything there is to know about creating a successful studio television programme. Packed with interviews from top executives from the UK, US, Australia and China, it includes case studies from hit international formats, from reality to drama to news – with scripts from *Britain's Got Talent*, *Big Brother*, *Coronation Street*, *Teletubbies*, *Channel 4 News* and more. Written by award-winning programme-makers, the book breaks television down genre by genre and explores pre-production, casting, scripting and paperwork, from call sheets to running orders. The authors also examine the multiplatform opportunities available for programme-makers internationally.

[www.ibtauris.com](http://www.ibtauris.com)

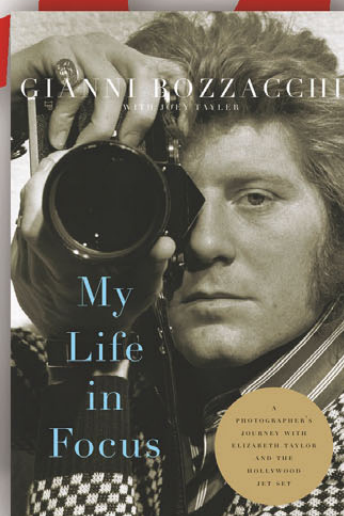


## THE SOUND OF MUSIC

By Caryl Flinn, BFI Classics, Palgrave, 105pp, paperback, illustrated, £12.99, ISBN 9781844574742

Fifty years after its release, *The Sound of Music* (1965) remains the most profitable and recognisable film musical ever made. Quickly consolidating its cultural authority, the Hollywood film soon eclipsed the German film and Broadway musical that preceded it to become one of the most popular cultural reference points of the 21st century. In this fresh exploration, Caryl Flinn foregrounds the film's iconic musical numbers, arguing for their central role in the film's longevity and mass appeal. Stressing the unique emotional bond audiences establish with *The Sound of Music*, Flinn traces the film's prehistories, its place among the tumultuous political, social and cultural events of the 1960s, and its spirited afterlife among fans around the world.

[bit.ly/2glcShv](http://bit.ly/2glcShv)



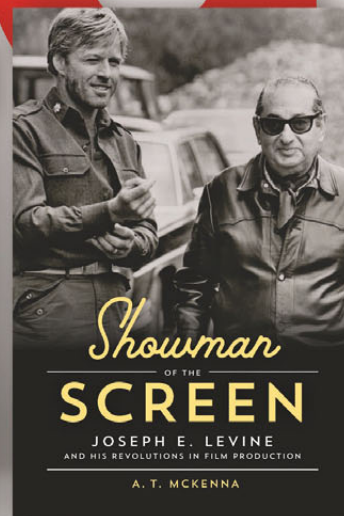
## MY LIFE IN FOCUS

**A Photographer's Journey with Elizabeth Taylor and the Hollywood Jet Set**

By Gianni Bozzacchi, University Press of Kentucky, hardback and ebook, illustrated, \$39.95/£43.50, ISBN 9780813168746

When Gianni Bozzacchi accepted an assignment as a photographer on the set of *The Comedians* (1967), his beautiful candid photos drew the attention of Elizabeth Taylor, who hired him as her personal photographer. Bozzacchi would go on to enjoy a jet-set life as her friend and confidant – preserving unguarded moments between Taylor and Richard Burton as they travelled the world – and became an internationally renowned photographer, shooting some of the biggest celebrities of the 20th century, including Audrey Hepburn, Steve McQueen, Raquel Welch and Clint Eastwood. This lively memoir, illustrated with many of the photographer's most iconic images, is an invaluable behind-the-scenes look at the business of filmmaking and the perils of celebrity.

[bit.ly/2focPjz](http://bit.ly/2focPjz)



## SHOWMAN OF THE SCREEN

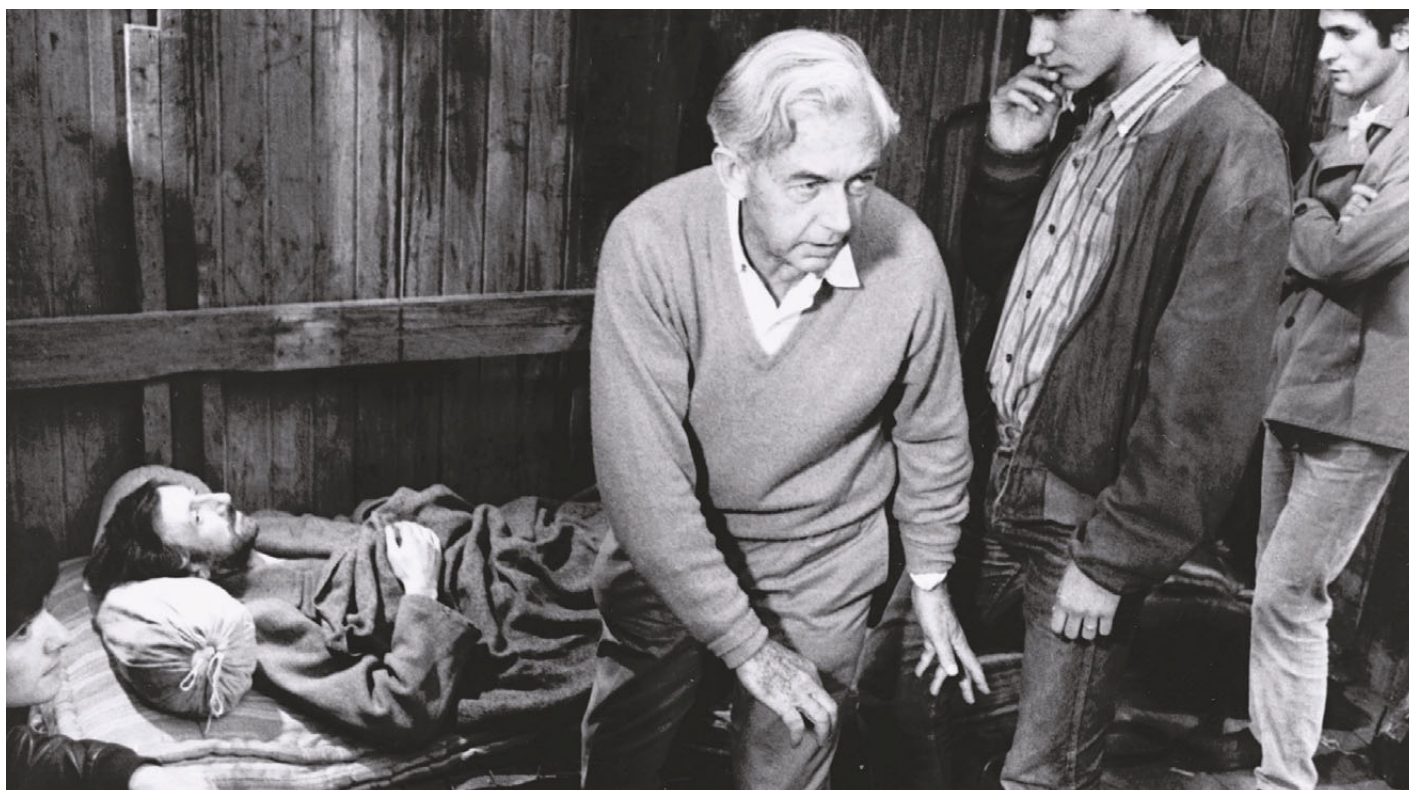
**Joseph E. Levine and His Revolutions in Film Promotion**

A.T. McKenna, University Press of Kentucky, 296pp, hardback and ebook, illustrated, \$45.00/£48.50, ISBN 9780813168715

Short, immaculately dressed, and shockingly foul-mouthed, Joseph E. Levine (1905-87) was larger than life. Alternately respected and reviled, this master of movie promotion brought films as varied as *Godzilla: King of the Monsters!* (1956), *The Graduate* (1967) and *A Bridge Too Far* (1977) to American audiences. Levine was also a trailblazer in promoting European arthouse cinema in the 1960s, making Federico Fellini's 8½ (1963) and feuding with Jean-Luc Godard over their production of *Le Mépris* (1963). In the first biography of this controversial pioneer, A.T. McKenna traces Levine's rise as an influential packager of popular culture, illuminating his talent for movie- and self-promotion, as well as his extraordinary career in the motion picture business.

[bit.ly/2g2HaFU](http://bit.ly/2g2HaFU)





Kick ass: Robert Bresson on the set of *Au hasard Balthazar* (1966)

## ESSENTIAL TRUTHS

### NOTES ON THE CINEMATOGRAPH

Robert Bresson, with an introduction by J.M.G. Le Clézio, New York Review Books Classics, 128 pp, \$14, ISBN 9781681370248

### BRESSON ON BRESSON: INTERVIEWS 1943-1983

Robert Bresson, New York Review Books, 352pp, \$24.95, ISBN 9781681370446

#### Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Robert Bresson's films can stand up very nicely without the burden of further mummery and veneration, so happy it is to find him speaking for himself in a steady, measured tone. In two volumes, New York Review Books has collected a goodly share of Bresson's commentary on his own work. *Notes on the Cinematograph*, first published in France in 1975 and usually translated in English as *Notes on Cinematography*, is a slim collection of Bresson's epigrammatic observations on his craft, most of them jotted through the 1950s, in the period during which his ideas about film style coalesced and he produced *Diary of*

*a Country Priest* (1951), *A Man Escaped* (1956) and *Pickpocket* (1959). In its pages he draws out a distinction between "Cinema" – the popular practice that draws on the traditions of projected, conscious, "theatrical" performance and catchy compositions – and his own "anti-system" of "Cinematography", which uses non-performing, non-professional, unselfconscious models, elliptical cutting and purposefully flat images which eschew the picturesque, shot invariably with a 50mm lens. The subject matter of *Bresson on Bresson: Interviews 1943-1983* is just what the title says – a significant portion of the interviews Bresson gave over the course of five decades. (A significant portion, but not everything – I note, for instance, the absence of Paul Schrader's interview from the September-October 1977 *Film Comment*.)

There is much overlap in the material that appears in the two books. As we learn from Pascal Mérigeau's introduction for *Bresson on Bresson*, the filmmaker would habitually whittle down his interviews before they went to press in order to express precisely what he meant to say and nothing more, and we can find many of the *Notes on the Cinematograph* chestnuts being fed to journalists – including Jean-Luc Godard – in the years before that book was finally published in 1975. In both volumes Bresson speaks very rarely of other directors'

films – using the proto-subtweet formulation 'X's film' in *Notes* when pointing out the failings of a contemporary – and finding little enough to praise when he does. (Twice, however, he can be found speaking highly of a passage in Mervyn LeRoy's 1944 war film *Thirty Seconds over Tokyo*, and his enthusiasm for John Glen's 1981 Bond outing *For Your Eyes Only* has been well recorded.) While Bresson insists on the total independence of cinematography from the other arts, he cribs nuggets of wisdom from such diverse sources as Bach, Cézanne, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Stendhal, Poe, and astronaut Michael Collins, with Paul Valéry, Blaise Pascal, and Michel de Montaigne coming in for a special place of pride in his quotable canon.

Drawing from these thinkers and, above all, the true north of his internal compass, Bresson outlines an approach that is defined by a dedication to the essential: "Not beautiful photography, not beautiful images," he writes in *Notes*, "but necessary images and photography." This quest for the "indispensable" is, in essence, a process of paring down – "to create is first of all to prune," as he puts it in 1960. On set, as he says in an interview accompanying the release of *Au hasard Balthazar* (1966), it is the pursuit of "a single angle that is capable of evoking all the other angles, without revealing them". It's a matter of finding "one thing that's the right

size, one that isn't" or, per *Notes*, of "Mak[ing] the objects look as if they want to be there." And through what sorcery is this achieved? The word that comes up time and time again is 'feeling' – for despite the fact that Bresson is that unusual film artist who has drafted a conscious and well-worked out manifesto on his creative operation, at the heart of it all is an intuition, a feeling about things and about the world itself. "Ideas gathered from reading will always be bookish ideas," he writes in *Notes*, dismissing his own catechism in the process. "Go to the persons and objects directly." This continues through a litany of commandments which show a not-infrequent fondness for flimsy paradox ("Give more resemblance in order to obtain more difference"), in which the final duty of the artist is summarised in words of the Greek Catholic liturgy: "Be attentive!"

Little comes through of Bresson the private man in either book, though he does make mention in passing of his experience in a German prison camp (he likens the glide of a *bateau*

*Despite the fact that Bresson has a well-worked out manifesto on his creative operation, at the heart of it all is an intuition, a feeling*

*mouche* in 1971's *Four Nights of a Dreamer* to that of a German prison barge which took him up the Rhine), his longtime residence on the Ile Saint-Louis in Paris (from which perch he speaks of seeing strolling hippies and suicides) and, most intriguingly, a rough-and-tumble early life: when asked to describe his younger self in 1977, he quizzically responds: "Violent? Absolutist? Excessive? Lots of alcohol and tobacco."

We never encounter a truly young Bresson in these pages – chronologically the earliest piece is a visit to the set of his *Angels of Sin* that appeared in the anti-Semitic, collaborationist journal *Je suis partout* in 1943, when Bresson was in his forties – and he only truly comes into his style in middle age, toiling on undaunted through the years in the face of incomprehension, hostility, and the indifference of producers. Bresson retains this fighting spirit into late life, and in that above-mentioned '77 interview, done in conjunction with the release of his eco-hysterical listless-youth masterpiece *The Devil, Probably*, he lays out a list of enemies: "The adversary is frivolous optimism; it's the money that's supposed to make everything OK; it's the crowd clamoring for things of no value; it's the primacy of force." The fierce moral indignation behind this answer is little diminished 40 years on, while that liturgical "Be attentive!" is also key to understanding Bresson's idea of evil – nothing more than inattention, a failure of vigilance, a lazy obeisance to hidebound convention, an absence of all-important feeling. "One of the characteristics of our era," he tells *Les Nouvelles littéraires* in 1974, "is not to pay attention." It is against such forces that Bresson waged his long, often solitary crusade, a struggle recorded in these most imperative chronicles. 📖

## KUROSAWA'S RASHOMON

### A Vanished City, a Lost Brother, and the Voice Inside His Iconic Films

By Paul Anderer, Pegasus Books, 256pp, US\$27.95, ISBN 9781681772271

#### Reviewed by Philip Kemp

When *Rashomon* won the Golden Lion at the 1951 Venice Film Festival, it achieved a fourfold impact. It alerted the world to the power and scope of Japanese cinema, of whose very existence most Western cinemagoers were unaware at the time. It catapulted Kurosawa Akira instantly into the ranks of the world's leading filmmakers. It made Mifune Toshiro the first Japanese actor to become an international star since Hayakawa Sessue in the 1910s. And it sparked off a minor vogue for films, plays and books about the relativity of truth.

Paul Anderer's book isn't in any conventional sense an analysis of the film, discussion of which occupies only a relatively small part of his text. Rather it's a blend of biography and psychological exegesis, concentrating mainly on Kurosawa's life up to and including the making of *Rashomon*, with occasional glances forward to the 12 black-and-white films that followed it. (The seven colour films that rounded off the director's career, from *Dodes'ka-den* in 1970 to *Madadayo* in 1993, are dismissed as being of little interest.) Quoting Kurosawa as asserting, "All my films circle around the problem of the self," Anderer suggests that "the self he needed to interrogate... is traceable to experiences bound to his childhood and youth".

Two experiences, Anderer maintains, stand out as key to Kurosawa's subsequent development as a person and as a creative artist. The first, in 1923 when he was 13 years old, was the Great Kanto Earthquake, in which large areas of Tokyo were levelled and burned and more than 140,000 people died. Kurosawa was born and grew up in Tokyo, and though he and his family

escaped serious injury he vividly recalled being taken to the worst devastated areas by his older brother Heigo, who forced him to look at the piled-up corpses and the shattered buildings.

The other key experience, as Anderer sees it, was the suicide of this same brother ten years later. Heigo was a *benshi*, one of the commentators who stood at the side of the screen when silent movies were shown, translating dialogue and explaining the action. Under his stage name of Suda Teimei, he had been one of the most popular *benshi*; but the coming of sound put him out of a job. Along with a girlfriend, he committed *shinju* (double suicide) by poison in a room in a country inn in Yagashima, some 80 miles south of Tokyo. The year 1933 was also the point at which Japan became definitively locked into the authoritarian, militaristic state that would lead the country into war and defeat. Kurosawa, as he shamefacedly confessed after the war, "offered no resistance to Japan's militarism", although only one of his wartime films, the rarely seen *The Most Beautiful* (1944), can be classified as out-and-out propaganda.

Years later Kurosawa was to say, "What I know about film, I learned from my brother." There's no doubt that Heigo's death affected him deeply, but to extrapolate from that, as Anderer tries to, reflections of the charged sibling relationship in films as different as *Stray Dog* (1949), *Rashomon*, *Ikiru* (1952), *The Lower Depths* (1957) and *High and Low* (1963) is perhaps a thesis too far. Occasionally, too, Anderer slips into a preachy tone: "We are troubled and weak," he chides us, "and take a less strenuous path."

His book is valuable, though, in providing a social and cultural context for the first half of Kurosawa's life; the writers who influenced him (Dostoevsky not least), his brief flirtation with left-wing activism, his love of the music of Ravel. It may not radically change our view of *Rashomon*, or of Kurosawa's work in general, but it suggests some unexpected and promising byways to explore. 📖



O brother, where art thou?: Kurosawa Akira on the set of *Rashomon* (1950)



# SHOOT SHOOT SHOOT

## The First Decade of the London Film-Makers' Co-operative, 1966-76

Edited by Mark Webber, LUX, 288pp,  
£20, ISBN 9780992884031

Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

The London Film-Makers' Co-operative broke the medium down into its essentials, and took experimental film from the underground scene to the Tate Gallery in a few short years. Experimental film, underground film, avant-garde film, independent film – all these terms were used to cover what is now by general consent called 'artists' moving image', but the common denominator among the earlier definitions was important. Having set out, in the words of its 1968 constitution, to "promote the use of film as a medium of artistic expression", as opposed to telling stories or documenting the real world, the Co-op filmmakers concentrated on the stuff itself: film as film, to use a famous phrase from the time.

The title of Mark Webber's collection comes from a telegram announcing the Co-op's birth in 1966 – "PURPOSE TO SHOOT SHOOT SHOOT SHOOT SHOOT STOP NEVER STOP [...] IF YOU READ SIGHT AND SOUND STOP" – to its New York progenitor, published in the Co-op's magazine *Cinim* and probably never sent; but the Londoners, quite a few of them Americans, soon distinguished themselves from the New York group, and shooting became in some instances a secondary matter, or even optional. As Lis Rhodes, whose *Dresden Dynamo* (1971-2) was made without a camera, says, "It was print print print." The seminal event in the Co-op's history was its acquisition of processing and printing equipment, opening up new realms of artistic possibilities.

Unlike the New York Co-op, the LFMC was a full-service outfit, encompassing exhibition, distribution and every stage of production in a series of semi-derelict buildings around Camden. Partly as a result of this relative freedom, the Co-op's radicalism came to embrace and transform the physical space in which its films were seen, which was seldom in ordinary cinemas. As the artist and filmmaker Gill Eatherley recalls, "We felt a need to take the projection situation out of the conventional cinema projection booth, down into the audience, where it became an integral part of the presentation experience."

There is a parallel to be drawn between the Co-op filmmakers' concern for the materiality of film – 'structural/materialist film' was another famous formulation – and Webber's attention to the textures of the Co-op's archive, a generous and well-chosen proportion of which he has included in his book. Flyers, floor plans, posters, programmes, letters, bulletins, catalogues, film frames, logbooks, accounts, agendas, minutes, manifestos, membership cards and magazine articles are reproduced; even the sans serif font is period. It seems likely that this emphasis on print ephemera reflects – or rather constitutes a refusal to conform to – our dematerialised times; in any case it makes the book a delightful object.

Webber's emphasis on materiality manifests itself in other ways as well. The body of the book consists of an oral history pieced together from Webber's interviews with the filmmakers, critics, programmers and assorted others who belonged to or crossed paths with the Co-op,



Kevin Pither, unknown, Barbara Schwartz, Roger Hammond, Peter Gidal and Malcolm Le Grice in 1972

and while the theoretical aspect of the group's activities is not neglected, the focus is on the interpersonal and the physical-spatial. The Co-op, having begun as a voluntary organisation, had little financial support in its first decade, and moved from defunct dairy to abandoned piano factory to closed-down laundry. What comes through in the interviews is the cold of the tiles, the feel of the scrounged mattresses which served as seating, and the aura of chemical agents, broken glass and cement dust.

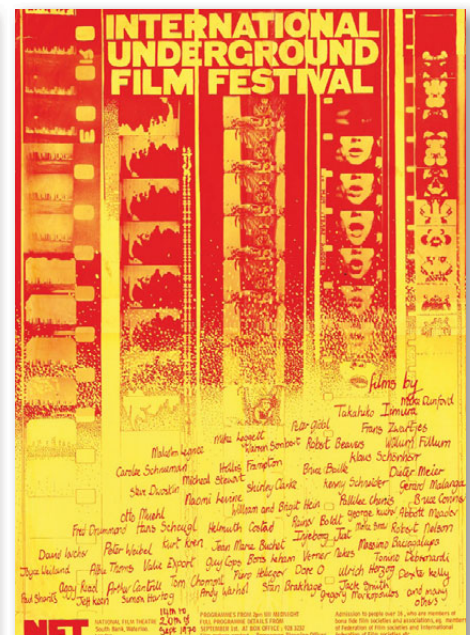
In some respects Webber's oral history recalls Jonathon Green's counter-culture compendium *Days in the Life* – in other words it's a hoot – and indeed the first part of the Co-op story involves some of the same colourful characters. The theme of what it means to be 'counter-cultural' recurs throughout. The Co-op was begun partly in reaction to established film culture, hence the dig at *Sight & Sound*; hence also the plan in a 1960s manifesto for a magazine that would stand "against B-feature worship". But in reality early

Co-op filmmakers such as Stephen Dwoskin, whose films helped inspire Laura Mulvey's famous critique of Hollywood's male gaze, and Jeff Keen, whose use of B-movie imagery was hardly unaffectionate, did not and could not have set themselves apart altogether.

Similarly the 1970s Co-op's successful attempts to win support and recognition from art institutions raised the question, as expressed by Erika Balsom in her recent book *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art*, "How does the progressive integration of cinema into the gallery and the museum change our conception of it?" The Co-op filmmaker William Raban reflects that the group's show of British Landscape Films at the Tate in 1975 "could be seen as dressing up a certain kind of filmmaking into a more culturally respectable activity". But respectability has its uses. It is unduly romantic to suppose that the films could have survived these 40 years without this kind of official recognition, and Webber's book makes one want to see them. 📺



Poster for an LFMC cinema event, May 1975



**International Underground Film Festival, Sept 1970**

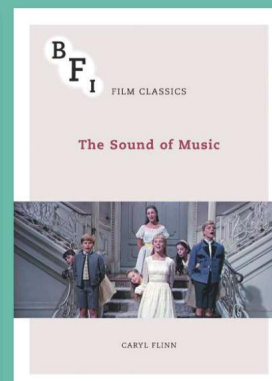
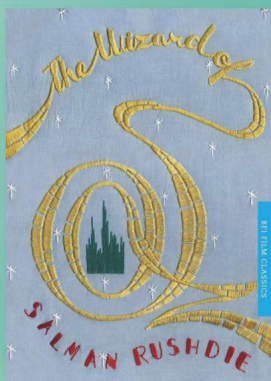
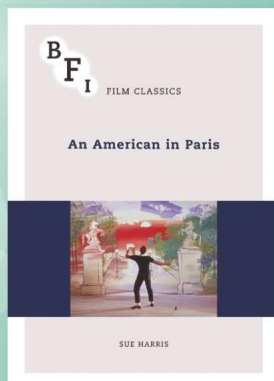




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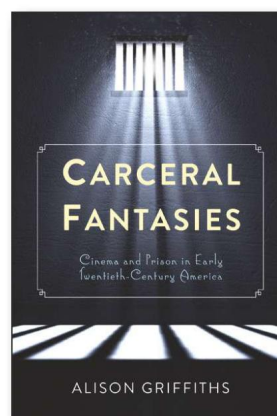


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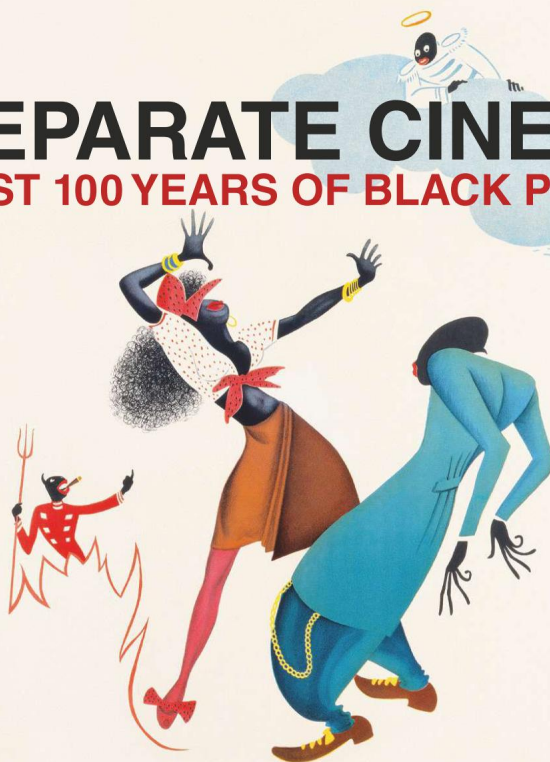


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## THE GREAT BRITISH BLAKE-OFF

What seems to have been lost in much of the discussion of *I, Daniel Blake*, up to and including your editorial ('Daniel in the lion's den', *S&S*, December 2016) is the consideration of whether the film is as good as its subject matter is important. The indisputable importance of one seems to me to have created a misjudgement of the other. It is, after all, a piece of drama and surely shouldn't be excused from criticism of this because of its ostensible subject.

There's some great work in the film, largely in the first hour. But as it goes on, cracks appear; it seems somehow less interested in finishing the story successfully, instead repeating stiffly the points it made with grace and greater subtlety earlier on, points it made *through* a believable story, not regardless of it.

For example, though Hayley Squires is excellent as Katie, and her character offers an intriguing contrast to Daniel, the film loses all sense of her as an active character. Her 'descent into prostitution' is framed by Daniel's reaction: these scenes are about his upset, his disappointment.

Perhaps the familiarity of Loach's style and subject matter means that we don't interrogate them enough.

**Stephen Glass** *London*

## DOUBLE IDENTITY

The caption to the main photo accompanying your interview with Earl Cameron ('Duke of Earl', *Home Cinema*, *S&S*, December 2016) says it shows Bonar Colleano and Cameron in *Pool of London*. But at no time in the film does Colleano wear a hat: the second man in the photo is actually the rogue Irishman who picks Cameron's character Danny up in a pub, persuades him to go to a night club and then steals his money. I have searched the cast list but presume that it was an uncredited role.

**Christopher Bruce** *Tenterden*

## NO SMALL PARTS

Philip Kemp ('Path of Glory', *S&S*, October 2016), quotes the director John Frankenheimer on Kirk Douglas playing a "secondary" role to Burt Lancaster in *Seven Days in May*. Douglas may have been second billed, but in its quiet effectiveness it isn't a secondary role.

In John Sturges's *Gunfight at the OK Corral* (1956) Douglas, as Doc Holliday, has the showier part – but that doesn't mean that it couldn't have been badly played. Fortunately, the actor has the power and technical command to make this performance one of the most effective in American cinema history.

**James Murray** *Ballymena, Northern Ireland*

## DMYTRYK IN BRITAIN

I am sorry that Timothy Gee (Letters, *S&S*, November 2016) found elements of my article on *Give Us This Day* misleading. I am aware of the other films that Edward Dmytryk

## LETTER OF THE MONTH WHAT MAKES SAMMY RUN?



Andrew Male ('West End boys', *S&S*, December 2016) provides a valuable reappraisal of Ken Hughes's *The Small World of Sammy Lee* (1962). In the previous issue, Ginette Vincendeau, writing on French film noir, makes passing reference to *Shoot the Pianist* (1960): it is difficult to imagine that Hughes and his star Anthony Newley had not seen François Truffaut's film, which may have encouraged Hughes to expand his BBC television play *Sammy* (1958), a solo turn by Newley, into something more.

Hughes's film has not to date been recognised as part of the British New Wave cycle, but Wolfgang Suschitzky's location cinematography, the editing (most evident in the opening sequence) and the jazz score place it as a late entry: an alternative title for Hughes's film might be 'The Loneliness of the Strip-Club Compère'. The film has an archetypal New Wave protagonist in

Sammy: like Truffaut's Charlie Kohler (Charles Aznavour), Sammy Lee is an outsider inhabiting a closed, insalubrious world but apart from it; the one plays piano in a Paris suburban bar, the other is a Soho strip-club compère who views his audience with contempt. Both are involved with gangsters. Newley's dapper appearance in his short white raincoat and his flip attitude, together with the sequences of him running through urban streets, create the image of a British Aznavour. Hughes's film, however, lacks the French film's "perky flights of fancy" (*Monthly Film Bulletin*, January 1961).

The original, multi-talented Newley has often been overlooked, and nowhere more so than in his homeland. Sammy Lee is his best film role, and hopefully will introduce a new generation to Newley. Perhaps Heironymus Merkin next?

**Roger Philip Mellor** by email

made in Britain but wanted to focus more thoroughly on the film in question.

*Obsession* (1949) – available on DVD in the UK – is particularly worth seeking out. Offered to Dmytryk by producer Nat Bronsten as a prerequisite to Bronsten's financing of *Give Us This Day*, it was made while the latter film was being set up. Yet there is no quickie B-movie feel to the final film, which boasts splendid photography (C. Pennington-Richards again) and a subtly modulated portrayal of polite menace from Robert Newton. The screenplay – adapted from his own book by Alec Coppel, who would go on to script *Vertigo* – displays a delicious gothic gruesomeness.

I did not mean to imply that Dmytryk planned

to relocate permanently to Britain – the final line of my piece was meant as a tantalising "what if?". But Dmytryk came to enjoy life in Britain, and five years later enthusiastically accepted the offer to make another film here, the first adaptation of Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair*.

**Fintan McDonagh** By email

## Additions and corrections

**December** p.62 We wrongly attributed the review of *United States of Love* to Michael Brooke. The reviewer was, in fact, Hannah McGill. p.67 *Creepy*, Certificate 15, 130m 16s; p.69 *The Dreamed Ones*, Certificate PG, 88m 52s; p.70 *The Edge of Seventeen*, Certificate PG, 104m 23s; p.71 *Ethel & Ernest*, Certificate PG, 94m 50s; p.72 *Francofonia*, Certificate 12A, 88m 9s; p.73 *Gimme Danger*, Certificate 15, 108m 35s; p.82 *The New Man*, Certificate 15, 75m 4s; p.84 *Paterson*, Certificate 15, 117m 46s; p.91 *The Wailing*, Certificate 15, 156m 4s

**November** p.89 *Richard Linklater Dream Is Destiny*, Certificate 15, 89m 55s



# TO SLEEP WITH ANGER



The spine-tingling coda of Charles Burnett's majestic, enigmatic film has its origins in the director's own past

**By Ashley Clark**

In Charles Burnett's films, you always have to keep an eye on the kids, who are rarely main characters but play pivotal roles nonetheless. Consider his brilliant debut *Killer of Sheep* (1977), a neorealism-inspired drama of everyday life in LA's predominantly African-American Watts district. Its unforgettable first scene depicts a small, cowed-looking boy being lectured by a stern offscreen father-figure on the importance of fighting back against bullies in order to be a real man. After this bracing opening, we don't see this moon-eyed lad again – we never even find out who he is – but the point is sharp enough: innocence rarely lasts long for black children in this impoverished suburb, scarred by residential segregation, racist police brutality and the violent uprisings of 1965. In the rest of *Killer of Sheep*, children – playful sprites full of hope and humour – pepper the landscape. They are poignant counterpoints to the drudgery-stricken adults; funhouse mirrors of their own sad futures.

In Burnett's third feature, the majestic and enigmatic *To Sleep with Anger* (1990), children are again crucial in a film ostensibly about adult relationships. The main narrative centres on Harry Mention (Danny Glover), a charismatic visitor from the Deep South who arrives one day on the doorstep of a middle-class church-going family in South Central Los Angeles. Mother Suzie (Mary Alice) and father Gideon

(Paul Butler) welcome their old friend in, but it's not long before his uncanny presence, steeped in the folkloric southern traditions Suzie and Gideon have for the most part left behind, begins to cause severe ructions in the family fabric.

Gideon falls gravely ill, while Harry's insinuatingly macho behaviour has a particularly influential effect on Suzie and Gideon's grown-up youngest son, the petulant twentysomething Babe Brother (Richard Brooks), accentuating the animus between him and his older brother Junior (Carl Lumbly), and turning Babe Brother against his wife Linda (Sheryl Lee Ralph). Babe Brother and Linda's young son Sunny (DeVaughn Walter Nixon) doesn't say much, but he's quietly present in many scenes of tension and menace. He's also the only character able to dent Harry's swaggering confidence, when he accidentally brushes Harry's foot with a broom, a superstitious no-no that sends the visitor into paroxysms of uncharacteristic panic.

It's fitting, then, that Sunny is the architect of Harry's downfall. Early in the film, Sunny carelessly spills his marbles: no harm done. Later on, though, shortly after a huge confrontation between Babe Brother and Junior has ultimately brought the family closer than ever before, Sunny does it again. Harry trips over the marbles, falls to the floor, and suffers a fatal cardiac arrest. In a quietly ghoulish, politically charged postscript, Harry's dead body is left in the kitchen, covered

*An unnamed boy blasts incessantly and tunelessly on his trumpet. His unappealing peals ring across the neighbourhood*

only by a sheet. The medics won't take him away, and the coroner is nowhere to be found. "If he was white, they'd have had him on his feet and out of here," comments one family friend.

But there's another child in *To Sleep with Anger*: an unnamed boy (played by Burnett's son) who blasts incessantly and tunelessly on his trumpet. His unappealing peals ring across the neighbourhood, at one point causing Suzie to drop an egg on the floor, at another distracting Harry as he's about to bring down an axe on the neck of a chicken. Midway through the film, Suzie, concerned about Harry's sinister behaviour, questions him about the quality of his friendship. Harry retorts with a riddle: "Like that boy next door playing his horn. If he was a friend, he would stop irritating people. But if he stops practising, he wouldn't be perfect at what he does someday."

In an interview in July 2016, I asked Burnett about the boy trumpeter, and he replied: "I used to play the trumpet when I was a kid, and I used to just drive the neighbours crazy. So that's where that came from. I used to intentionally leave the window open and just blow as loud as I could out of my room." There's something autobiographical, then, about the film's spine-tingling coda. Following a shot of Harry's body still festering in the homestead, Burnett cuts to a shot of the boy honking away tunelessly. After a few bars, however, his awful playing magically, seamlessly becomes perfect – a soulful lament which provides the melody line of the song that scores the end credits. It's the sound of a modest yet brilliant filmmaker slyly announcing the perfection of his own craft. 

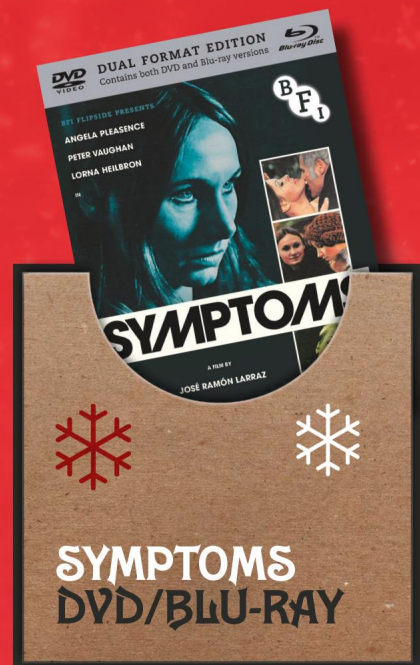
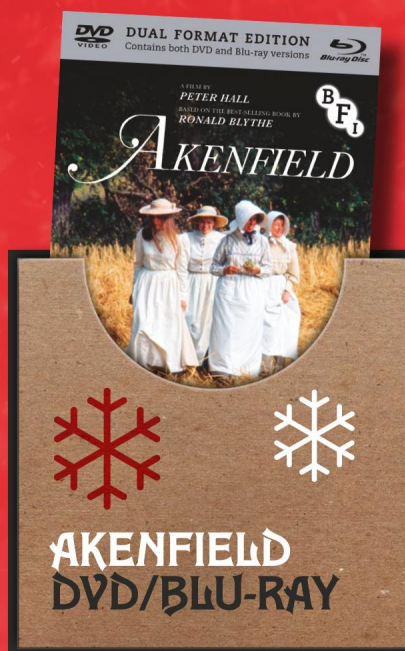
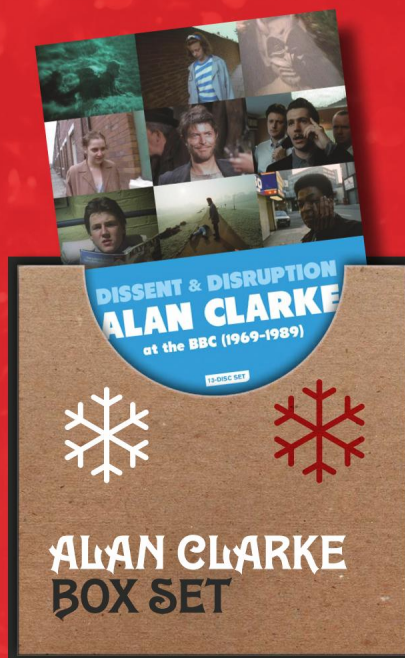
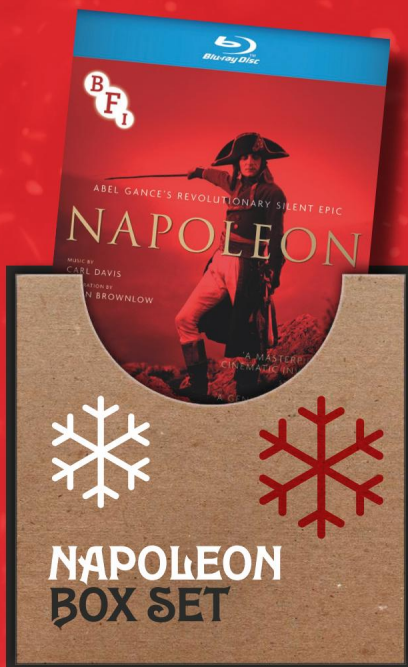
**i** *To Sleep with Anger* screens at BFI Southbank, London, as part of the 'Black Star' season on 18 and 22 December





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